

Communicating with Parents about Children's Learning



**A Guide for
Kindergarten
Educators**

Revised Draft

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This revised draft of *Communicating with Parents about Children's Learning* incorporates feedback from educators in Kindergarten programs across the province. As the Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports are developed and used in the fall of 2017 and the winter and spring of 2018, educators will gain new insights that will inform the next edition of this document.

Introduction

Communication with parents about a child's learning should be ongoing throughout the school year and should include a variety of formal and informal means, ranging from formal written reports to informal notes, conversations, and discussions.

Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2016, p. 12

Effective educator-parent¹-child communication is fundamental to growth in learning. Educators are encouraged to develop a range of practices and strategies for effective, ongoing communication with parents and children. These might include the sharing of documentation of children's thinking and learning in a variety of ways, as well as notes, chats, newsletters, blogs, classroom visits, and many other opportunities to support parents' participation in their child's learning journey. Communication with families comes in a variety of forms and is responsive and flexible in order to be supportive of each child and family.

This guide focuses primarily on communicating with parents through formal written accounts using the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates. It is offered as a resource to support educators in reviewing and reflecting on their practices with respect to writing comments in the Communication of Learning templates, providing feedback, and engaging parents in ongoing dialogue, all with the aim of supporting growth in children's learning.

The information educators provide in the Communication of Learning templates is an important element in the ongoing communication discussed above. Personalized, clear, precise, and meaningful comments are essential for informing parents about what their children have learned, their growth as learners, and next steps for learning.

To engage parents in their child's learning, written comments in the Communication of Learning templates should:

- use personalized, clear, precise, and meaningful language;
- provide essential information that supports parents as partners in their child's learning;
- honour the unique pattern of learning and growth of each individual child;
- focus on key learning; growth in learning; and possible next steps in learning.

¹ The word *parents* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

Part 1: Effective Assessment and Evaluation in Kindergarten

Assessment and evaluation of children’s learning in Kindergarten are focused on the individual child and are not based on standard levels of achievement. As noted in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016, p. 43):

As educators assess children’s learning, they must bear in mind that children enter the Kindergarten program at different stages of development and with diverse backgrounds and experiences – and that they will leave it at different stages and at different points in their growth in relation to the program expectations.

In Ontario, children are seen as “competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential and experience”. It is also recognized that families want the best for their child and bring “diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives” (*The Kindergarten Program*, p. 10). These foundational views of children and families underpin the way in which learning is viewed and communicated by educators.

Assessment *for* and *as* Learning

Educators and children engage in a variety of assessment practices to help all children grow in their learning. These practices support “assessment *for* learning” and “assessment *as* learning”.²



Questions for Reflection...

When thinking about assessment, educators consider questions such as the following:

- What are some practices and processes that you, as co-educators, can engage in right from the beginning that will support you in understanding who the learners in your class are, and what traits they have (e.g., learning dispositions; how they approach materials, peers, adults)?
- What are some shifts in practices and processes that you and your school and board colleagues might consider collaboratively that would enable you to focus on children’s learning, as outlined in *The Kindergarten Program*, from the very beginning of the school year? For example, what kind of shift would allow you to start focusing on pedagogical documentation earlier in September?

² Detailed discussions of assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning in Kindergarten are included in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016), pp. 6–9, and *The Kindergarten Program*, pp. 36–45.

Educators use pedagogical documentation to make thinking and learning visible – to develop a shared understanding with the children of who they are as learners, what they are learning, where they are in their learning, and where they are going next. As educators interact with children in play and inquiry in a variety of learning contexts, for example, they determine when, where, why, and how to apply the strategy of “noticing and naming the learning”, which enables the children to understand what they are learning and to build on what they have learned. Picturing their learning in this way supports children in moving forward, no matter what their developmental level.

As the children participate in and reflect on a variety of learning experiences, they develop and deepen their understanding of what their learning looks like and what their next steps in learning might be. (This strategy establishes the foundation for the more formal use of *learning goals* and *success criteria* in later grades.)

Providing descriptive feedback and reflecting on the documentation of children’s learning with the children creates opportunities for them to develop the skills of self- and peer-assessment.

Evaluation

As stated in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*, p. 11, evaluation in Kindergarten is the summarizing of evidence of a child’s learning in relation to the overall expectations outlined in *The Kindergarten Program* at a given point in time – that is, at the end of a reporting period – in order to specify the child’s key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning. Using professional knowledge and judgement, educators interpret and judge the evidence of learning, to determine a child’s growth in relation to the overall expectations (and/or the learning expectations outlined in the child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP), where applicable). In determining a child’s growth, educators also take into account their knowledge of the child as a learner.

From Assessment to Communication with Parents

Educators approach the assessment and evaluation process by viewing each child as “competent and capable”. When they apply this “asset-based view”, educators experience a shift in thinking. Their focus is on the child’s learning and the multiple ways in which the child is demonstrating that learning. This is reflected both in the way they communicate with parents in general and in the way they complete the Communication of Learning report. For further discussion of using the “asset lens”, refer to [page 16](#), and see Appendix A for sample comments that illustrate this shift in thinking.



Did You Know?

All co-educators who are part of the Kindergarten team contribute to the observation, monitoring, and assessment of each child’s learning – that is, to the process of gathering and communicating information about learning. The classroom teacher ensures the completion of the templates.

In some instances, educators may find that the evidence they gather about a child's learning identifies enduring concerns – ongoing learning-related issues that do not seem to be resolving over time. Guidance regarding the communication of such concerns to families is provided on page 14.

Part 2: The Kindergarten Communication of Learning Templates

Versions of the Templates

The **Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations** report is not summative in nature; it is intended to provide parents with an *overview* of their child’s learning and early evidence of growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program (2016)*, as well as with information about appropriate next steps to further the child’s learning. The Initial Observations report is issued in October or November.

The **Initial Observations** report provides an opportunity to:

1. establish a positive relationship between educators and parents;
2. involve parents as partners in conversations about their child’s learning, about the educators’ assessment, and about how parents can support their child’s learning;
3. develop strategies for next steps in the child’s learning.

The **Kindergarten Communication of Learning** reports are intended to provide parents with descriptions, written in plain language and including anecdotal comments, about their child’s strengths and growth in relation to the overall expectations *within each of the four frames* of *The Kindergarten Program*. Next steps in the child’s learning are also indicated, to inform parents of the educators’ plans for supporting the child’s new learning at school and to assist them in supporting their child’s learning at home.

The Communication of Learning reports are issued at the end of the second and third reporting periods.³ The report issued at the end of the second reporting period reflects the child’s growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations introduced and developed from September to January/February of the school year. The report issued at the end of the third reporting period reflects the child’s growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations introduced or further developed from January/February to June of the school year.

The Communication of Learning reports include tear-off sections for parents’ acknowledgement of receipt of the report and for their comments and/or request to



Did You Know?

Parents are the intended audience for the Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports. The reports can strengthen the relationship between home and school.

³ For more information about the dates of issue of the reports, and for specific instructions about completing the templates (e.g., when to use the boxes indicating Individual Education Plan [IEP] and English as a second language [ESL]), see *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum (2016)*, pp. 12 and 15–16.

discuss with the educators the information provided. Parents are asked to return these sections to the school.



Questions for Reflection...

When thinking about completing the templates, educators consider questions such as the following:

- What are some of the strategies and resources we use from the beginning of the school year to facilitate a focus on learning that will inform our comments in the Communication of Learning reports later on?
- What are some of the ways we gather evidence through pedagogical documentation to assist in writing our comments? How might the organization of the learning environment inform the evidence?
- What are some of the ways we build and maintain relationships with parents to encourage an ongoing partnership between home and school?
- How might the Initial Observations report be used to further effective partnerships with parents to support their children’s learning?

Considering the Needs of All Learners

English Language Learners

All of the templates have a box or boxes labelled “ESL”. For many children in Kindergarten who have English language learning needs, accommodations to support their learning in relation to the overall expectations may be all that is required to meet their language learning needs. For these children, the English as a Second Language (ESL) box should *not* be checked on the Communication of Learning report.

When a child’s learning and growth in learning are based on expectations modified from the expectations in a given frame in *The Kindergarten Program* to support English language learning needs, educators will check the “ESL” box for that frame.

Educators will *not* check the “ESL” box to indicate only:

- that the child is an English language learner; or
- that accommodations have been provided to support learning.

When program expectations are modified, assessment and evaluation will be based on the documented modified expectations, and the modifications will be explained to the parents. Educators, knowing their students’ families, should consider, where appropriate, asking parents if they wish to involve an interpreter to facilitate their understanding of the information presented in the Communication of Learning reports.

When an English language learner requires modifications to program expectations to address *both* language-learning needs and special education needs, both the “ESL” box and the “IEP” box are checked.

Children with Special Education Needs

All of the templates have a box or boxes labelled “IEP”.

- If the child requires only accommodations to support learning, educators will *not* check the “IEP” box. Key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning are based on the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program*.
- When the learning expectations in a child’s IEP are based on the overall expectations in a given frame but have modifications, educators must select the “IEP” box for that frame and include the following statement:
“Program expectations have been modified to meet the needs of the child.”
- Where the expectations in a child’s IEP are alternative learning expectations, the educator must check the “IEP” box for the frame and must include the following statement: *“Key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning are based on alternative learning expectations in the IEP.”*



Did You Know?

The principle, set out in *The Kindergarten Program*, that *all* children are “competent, curious, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential and experience” aligns with the set of shared beliefs and guiding principles outlined in *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* (2017), page 5. For more information about planning for children with special education needs in Kindergarten, see *The Kindergarten Program*, pages 97–100.



Questions for Reflection...

When thinking about completing the templates for English language learners and children with special education needs, educators consider questions such as the following:

- What are some ways in which the Kindergarten program allows for multiple entry points for learning?
- What are some of the many ways in which English language learners demonstrate their learning?
- How does the Kindergarten program support opportunities for children with special education needs to demonstrate their learning?

Part 3: Communicating Information about Learning Using the Templates

As noted in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016, p. 13), the templates are designed to provide parents with “clear, detailed, and straightforward information” about their child’s learning. The following sections offer guidance in communicating information in this way using the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates, as well as in supplementing these formal reports with ongoing communication and through building relationships with families.

The Focus of the Communication of Learning Reports

At the end of each reporting period, educators will use the appropriate template to communicate information, through written comments, about three aspects of the child’s learning: *Key Learning*, *Growth in Learning*, and *Next Steps in Learning*. These terms are defined as follows:

Key Learning: The most important or significant skills and/or understandings (knowledge) that the child has demonstrated during the reporting period, in relation to the overall expectations. It is appropriate for educators to include their perceptions about the child’s interests and learning preferences in their descriptions of *key learning*.

Growth in Learning: Positive developments in learning that the child has demonstrated over the reporting period, in relation to the overall expectations. Developmental stage, learning trajectory, and/or other individual processes of learning should be taken into account when evaluating and describing *growth in learning*.

Next Steps in Learning: Ways in which the child can move forward in developing knowledge and skills, in relation to the overall expectations, both at school and at home. Developmental stage, learning trajectory, and/or other individual processes of learning such as those outlined in IEPs should be taken into account when determining *next steps in learning*.



Did You Know?

The four frames help us structure our thinking about learning and assessment to align with “the way that children’s learning naturally occurs” (*The Kindergarten Program*, p. 13). In view of the richness of children’s learning during play and inquiry, any given moment may involve learning that can be tied to more than one frame. Teachers use their professional judgement when examining evidence of learning to determine which frame or frames the evidence aligns with best.



Questions for Reflection...

When composing comments for all children, educators consider questions such as the following:

- From our synthesis of the gathered documentation, what does the evidence tell us is the most significant learning demonstrated by this child at this time? How does this learning link to the overall expectations? What does it tell us about the growth in this child's learning?
- For a child with an IEP that outlines modified and/or alternative learning expectations, what is the most significant learning demonstrated by this child at this time in relation to these learning expectations? What does it tell us about the growth in this child's learning?
- How can we use tools such as developmental continua and learning trajectories in socially and culturally equitable ways when trying to better understand how children's thinking and learning relate to the overall expectations?

The Role of Professional Judgement

Educators will use their professional judgement, informed by the evidence gathered through pedagogical documentation and their knowledge of child development and of the expectations outlined in *The Kindergarten Program*, to decide which aspects of the child's key learning and growth in learning, and which next steps, are the most important to comment on for the reporting period.

Ongoing reciprocal communication between parents and educators throughout the year will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the child's growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations in and across the four frames of *The Kindergarten Program*. The comments in the Communication of Learning reports are a distillation of the evidence of learning accumulated over time, with special consideration given to more recent evidence of the child's learning.

Educators need to be selective in the evidence of learning that they cite in their comments, focusing on the most significant learning and growth and knowing that they can elaborate and draw attention to a wider range of evidence, if appropriate, in later conversations with parents.



Did You Know?

Every child's Communication of Learning report must include next steps in learning. Educators use their professional judgement, taking into account their relationship with each child and family, to determine the frame or frames within which next steps will be included.



Questions for Reflection...

When identifying next steps for children, educators consider questions such as the following:

- Why have we chosen to highlight this learning for this child at this time in this context?
- How does the evidence we've gathered help us determine the next steps in learning for the child?
- How can we describe the next steps in a way that focuses on the child's engagement in learning, rather than focusing on what the adults will do?
- How are the next steps applicable in a variety of contexts?
- What are some ways that we might develop a shared understanding with the child and their parents about what the child's next steps in learning should be?

Equitable and Inclusive Communication

As in all aspects of teaching and learning in Ontario's classrooms, it is important to take into account the diversity of the children in the Kindergarten program and their families when using the Communication of Learning templates. According to *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (2014, p. 86), "the dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status".

Partnerships with families are founded on relationships built through ongoing, two-way communication. Kindergarten children and their families possess a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that are reflected in their individual identities. In view of this diversity, educators strive to listen and learn from families, and to communicate information about a child's learning in ways that best support understanding and the development of a positive relationship. How these relationships are established and maintained may differ, depending on the particular child and family. In all cases, cultivating sensitivity to individual differences, through both approach and use of language, supports understanding that enhances the parent-educator partnership and the child's growth and school experience.

For some families, it may be helpful to ask parents if they wish to involve other educators (e.g., special education resource teachers), in-school teams, members of the extended family, and/or community support personnel such as interpreters, settlement workers, members of faith communities, community service providers, or others to assist in communicating information about children's learning. Indigenous families may

wish to include community members such as Elders, Métis Senators, or Indigenous counsellors.



Questions for Reflection...

In composing comments, educators consider questions such as the following:

- How are we taking into account the unique and diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives and experiences of children and their families? How are we checking our assumptions for possible bias in order to be sensitive to diverse needs?
- How do our comments – in both content and language – take into account and positively reflect each child’s unique identity and how it intersects with that child’s learning?

Communicating Enduring, Evidence-Based Concerns

As noted above, educators are expected to “develop and maintain a collaborative, complementary, and reciprocal relationship with children and their families” (*Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*, p. 5). Within this relationship, educators may share areas of concern as appropriate, keeping in mind established board and school cultures and processes. Educators choose how, when, and where to communicate enduring, evidence-based concerns with parents while maintaining a focus on the child’s learning.

The purpose of the Communication of Learning report is to share information about children’s key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning (as outlined at the beginning of Part 3). It may not be the appropriate place to document concerns. When educators perceive that there may be a significant area of concern, they draw upon the range of structures, policies, and procedures that are in place in their school or school board to identify, monitor, and – if necessary – document what they have found. See Appendix B for further discussion and sample comments that support an understanding of how best to approach enduring, evidence-based concerns within and outside of the Communication of Learning report.

Composing Written Comments

Comments are a distillation of the educators’ observations and assessment of the child’s learning, based on evidence gathered through pedagogical documentation over time. Like all communication about learning, the written comments should be designed to provide detailed information that will support children in their learning, assist educators



Did You Know?

“[Early childhood is] a period of momentous significance ... By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.”

Margaret Donaldson, Robert Grieve, and Chris Pratt, *Early Childhood Development and Education: Readings in Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 1, as cited in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016), p. 8

Focusing on the child’s learning in our communications with families supports both the child’s growth and the family’s understanding of their child as a competent and capable learner.

in establishing plans for further learning, and help parents support their child’s learning at home (*Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*, p. 13).

In the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates, boxes are provided for comments. Educators use their professional judgement to communicate, clearly and fully, the child’s Key Learning, Growth in Learning and, where applicable, Next Steps. That goal may be accomplished without filling up the boxes completely – there is no requirement as to the length of the written comments.



Questions for Reflection...

When thinking about communicating with parents about a child’s learning, educators consider questions such as the following:

- How does the evidence of learning that is being communicated make the child’s unique patterns of learning visible?
- In our ongoing communication with the child’s parents, what are some opportunities and processes for us to discuss any emerging concerns with regard to the child’s learning and growth that we have observed, based on documented evidence over time?
- What is the impact on these young learners and their opportunities for further learning when we focus on the evidence of their learning and growth rather than evaluating them through the lens of their achievement?

Comments that are based on the “collaborative, complementary, and reciprocal relationship” that educators have developed with each child and their family in the

Kindergarten classroom (*Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*, p. 5) will be both meaningful and personalized.

Comments should provide parents with *clear, precise, focused, personalized, and meaningful* feedback.

Clarity and Precision

Written comments are most helpful when they use clear, precise, concrete, and concise language, and everyday vocabulary that is free of professional jargon.

Educational terminology taken directly from *The Kindergarten Program*, while it may be clear to educators, is less helpful for communicating information to parents. Precise information and concrete examples taken from the ongoing documentation of a child's learning communicate clearly and vividly, and help support the family's understanding of their child's learning.

The readability of the comments is also very important, so they should be typed in a clear and readable font, no smaller than 9 pt.

Focus

As noted above, the comments should focus on the most significant aspects of the child's learning in relation to the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program* – those that are most relevant to the child's learning and development in the reporting period. (It is not necessary to address all of the overall expectations individually or to use the exact language of the expectations, but it is important to anchor the comments to the learning outlined in the expectations.) Descriptions of the growth in the child's understanding and skills that has been observed since the last reporting period should be included. It is always important to focus on the child's strengths – in other words, to use an "asset lens". See Appendix A for sample comments that illustrate an asset-based view.

The comments may include next steps in learning. The descriptions of next steps focus on the most significant areas in which the child can move forward in learning and development, and provide concrete information and specific suggestions about the learning that the child might engage in next, with the support of the educators and the family.



Questions for Reflection...

In composing comments, educators consider questions such as the following:

- How will we phrase our comments so that they will be clear to, and understood by, the child's family?
- What evidence are we providing to support our description of the child's learning?
- In what ways are we able to notice and comment on the range of learning demonstrated by the diversity of learners in our classes? How would our ability to do this be limited if we were using a checklist instead?

Personalization

Comments are tailored to the individual child, and should include specific examples of documented evidence about the child's learning gathered during the reporting period. When composing comments, educators bear in mind the child's learning in relation to the overall expectations.

The Educator's Voice

Individual educators naturally use their own voice, and their own forms of expression, to convey details relevant to each child's learning and development in ways that reflect and honour their relationship with each child and family.

Parents respond to the authenticity of the educator's voice as it is conveyed through the written comments, which communicate both information and shared investment in the child's learning and well-being.

Sample Comments

In the following section, sample comments are provided to help guide educators in composing comments and to support professional dialogue.⁴

As we continue to learn together, our thinking about how best to support student learning continues to evolve. These sample comments reflect our current best thinking about communicating children's learning. We offer these samples (and those in the two appendices) to provide an opportunity for educators to reflect on their practice in preparation for writing their own comments.

⁴ These comments are intended to be samples rather than exemplars, since they do not take into account the unique relationship between each child, the child's family, and the educators.

Comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations Report

As noted above, the Initial Observations report gives parents an overview of the child’s key learning and growth in learning during the early fall of the school year, along with information about next steps in learning. As an overview, the Initial Observations comments provide an integrated look at what the child has learned across the frames.

Sample comments for an Initial Observations report are provided below.

Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
<p>Ryan uses social skills when playing with his friends (e.g., at the spinners and blocks and when playing soccer). He acts as a leader by inviting others in, cheering classmates on, using strategies to pick teams, and making sure that everyone gets a turn. For example, he says, “Let’s do Rock, Paper, Scissors to decide”.</p> <p>Ryan demonstrates his interest in writing and in collecting and organizing data when he uses a clipboard to keep score. He makes sure that scores are recorded accurately so that a champion can be determined in a fair way, which is an example of his understanding of numbers and quantity. Ryan also shows problem-solving skills and empathy when he calmly supports his friends as they settle disputes about the winner of the game.</p> <p>Ryan has recently expanded his design skills – he has been seeking out different kinds of tools and materials. He had ideas about constructing the soccer playing area with his friends – “We need something to make the goal posts stronger so they don’t fall down”.</p> <p>We will support Ryan as a writer in areas of interest to him, to develop his understanding of how writing works and how it can be used for different purposes, such as writing rules for games he invents, creating signs, making lists, and sending notes to others.</p>	

The sample above illustrates how an educator might refer to overall expectations in a natural way when writing initial observations about a child’s learning. The sample touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 3, 2, 1, 26, 10, 19, 20, 15, 5, 24. In this sample, all four frames are represented.

Maia uses several strategies when she engages with the materials, routines, children, and adults in the classroom. When she enters the classroom, we observe her watching or walking to various areas in the room to see what is happening, before choosing where she wants to spend her time. Sometimes she starts her day reading, doing puzzles, or observing our pet hermit crab. On other days she chooses more active options, such as using the hopscotch mat or large blocks. She adjusts the volume of her voice to meet the needs of her audience – for instance, when speaking to Ms. M, who is deaf in one ear, or when calling out to friends outdoors. This shows that Maia is able to think about and adapt her actions, depending on the context. She has commented on the flow of our day, saying, for example, “Recess is next after we play, right?” or telling a friend, “After this, we go to the Gym with Mr. S”. This demonstrates Maia’s understanding of time and of the pattern of our days at school.

Maia often chooses materials that allow her to design and construct. In these first weeks, we have often noticed Maia using different counting strategies during construction with both large and small blocks – for example, she may touch each block as she counts and she knows when to stop the count when the blocks are arranged in a circle. She has noticed that there is an “a” on either side of the “i” in her name, and makes connections to those letters in the environment (“my street has an ‘a’, like me”).

As Maia continues to use materials, interact with others, and demonstrate her thinking, we will notice and name the kinds of connections she makes – for example, “Letters are used in my name and in the world”, “There are many ways to count and sort objects”, and “There are many ways to solve a problem”.

The sample above touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 4, 6, 2, 9, 29, 7, 8, 1, 16, 18, 24, 15, 17, 11.

For additional samples of comments and partial comments, please see Appendices A and B.

Comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning Reports

The Communication of Learning reports provide clear descriptions, including anecdotal comments, about the child’s learning and growth in relation to the overall expectations *specific to each of the four frames of the Kindergarten program*: Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Problem Solving and Innovating.

The four frames are designed to reflect the integrated way in which learning occurs in children’s play and inquiry in the Kindergarten classroom, but each focuses on distinct aspects of learning. As part of their program planning, educators familiarize themselves with the descriptions of the frames in *The Kindergarten Program*, and they draw on that knowledge to describe key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in relation to the overall expectations identified for each frame.

Sample comments for the Communication of Learning report are provided below. The sample for each of the four frames refers to a different child, in order to illustrate the personalization of written comments.

Belonging and Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	
<p>Omar interacts with the rest of the children in creative ways – by observing their play and passing them new materials, then showing them new ways to put the materials together. He shows a growing interest in creating and designing with various materials as he draws and constructs many works of art. In this way, he communicates what he is thinking and feeling quite clearly. He also uses clearly organized and precise drawings to show how he solves mathematical challenges. He has contributed books for the classroom library with very detailed illustrations. We will give Omar the camera and encourage him to capture and share his thinking and creations, adding to the examples of how he contributes to our class learning.</p>	

The sample above illustrates how an educator might refer to overall expectations in a natural way when writing about the most significant learning and growth of a child. The sample touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 26, 1, 3, 24, 13, 22, 23, 4, 19, 20, 9, 30, 2. These expectations occur across all four frames.

Self-Regulation and Well-Being	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	
<p>Alasie uses strategies to self-regulate. When she looks away while listening to a story, she is able to bring her attention back and still understand what is happening. She has learned to use the visual schedule on her own now, so she can tell what is coming next. We have observed growth in Alasie's ability to identify and take responsibility for a broader range of her emotions (e.g., "My stomach feels nervous. I'm going to do my yoga breathing").</p> <p>As she continues to try new things and expand her friendships with others, we encourage Alasie to name and describe her emotions in new and unfamiliar situations.</p>	

The sample above touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 2, 1, 16, 18, 6, 3.

Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	
<p>Kaden knows that there are many ways to communicate his thinking, and changes how he represents his learning based on the audience. After we have read a book, he tries out some of the text features in his own writing. For example, he said, "Look, I made these letters dark so it shows the guy is yelling danger". When he works in a group, he sometimes asks others what letters are in a word, or shares his suggestions about what a character in a book might be thinking. These literacy behaviours demonstrate Kaden's ability to use what he knows about reading in his writing.</p> <p>Kaden shows his understanding of math concepts (e.g., spatial reasoning, number grouping, his sense of quantity) when he builds construction sites: He counts the number of scoops of sand he takes, figures out the number of objects he can fit in a small space, and keeps track of cars going in and out of the parking lot. He sorts and organizes blocks and other materials into groups. This skill is a building block for an understanding of the relationship between numbers and, eventually, addition and subtraction. He also applies that thinking to help him make decisions about how he manipulates and sorts materials (e.g., "They aren't the same, I'm moving some over here").</p>	

The sample above touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 1, 11, 10, 3, 15, 17, 20, 24.

Opportunities for literacy and mathematics learning take place throughout the school day, enabling educators to collect a wide variety of evidence of learning that may be communicated to parents in many ways throughout the reporting period. In the sample above, the educator has chosen to use the Communication of Learning report to comment on both literacy and mathematics behaviours. However, they could also have chosen to include only one of the two on the report, while communicating information about the other in different ways. *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* states, "Educators will use their professional judgement, supported by information provided in *The Kindergarten Program*, to determine which specific expectations will be used to evaluate growth and learning in relation to the overall expectations within each frame, and which ones will be accounted for in instruction and assessment but not necessarily evaluated" (page 10).

Problem Solving and Innovating	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	
<p>Alex questions the way things work, and creates theories and tests them out, particularly during outdoor play.</p> <p>Alex is trying to expand their* thinking by including theories that other children have talked about or ones that Alex has found in books (e.g., Alex applied what they saw in a book about how tunnels are made to improve the structure of the tunnels they were making in the sand).</p> <p>Alex takes photos and makes videos to document the design process as well as the end product (e.g., the cushion they designed to make landing at the bottom of the slide safer). We will encourage Alex to use these photos and videos to show others how Alex tests theories and solves problems.</p> <p>As a reader, Alex also solves problems – for example, when they read a word that doesn't make sense or that they don't recognize, they check the picture and the starting sound to figure out the word.</p>	

**Alex is a gender-fluid child whose preferred pronouns are "they" and "their".*

The sample above touches on the following overall expectations (in the order in which they appear): 22, 24, 11, 1, 3, 26, 4, 12, 9.



Questions for Reflection...

In general, when thinking about assessment and evaluation in their daily practice, educators consider questions such as the following:

- What shifts are occurring in our daily assessment practices as a result of the alignment between *The Kindergarten Program* and the policy for communicating children’s learning set out in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*?
- What is the role of pedagogical documentation in supporting assessment *for, as, and of* learning?
- In what ways might we notice and describe growth in learning?
- How might we use our collective learning from having completed one set of Communication of Learning reports to inform our ongoing assessment and communication practices?

Conclusion

The Importance of Educator Collaboration and Planning

The comments that educators write in a child’s Communication of Learning report are supported by the processes of planning, assessment, and evaluation. In order to write clear, precise, personalized, and meaningful comments, educators work as a team to carefully plan for assessment and regularly notice and name the learning so that children know where they are in the learning and where they need to go next. All the educators involved in the child’s learning contribute to the collection of information that the Kindergarten teacher considers in order to determine and describe key learning, growth in learning, and next steps.

For additional resources on assessment and evaluation in Kindergarten, educators may wish to review the text and video resources and the FAQs provided on the Kindergarten pages of the [EduGAINS website](#).

Appendix A: Illustrating Shifts in Thinking about Children’s Learning

Pedagogy can be defined as the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports that understanding of learning. Essentially it is the study of the teaching and learning process.

Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), p. 16

The sample comments below highlight shifts in the way that educators have come to think and communicate about children’s learning. They are meant to be taken as excerpts from a longer set of comments.

As you read these comments, think about what processes and structures the educators might have established at the beginning of the school year to help them gather evidence of learning that would lead to the writing of these comments.



Lee* is learning to sit with their legs crossed and listen for longer periods during carpet time. Lee enjoys listening to the stories we read each day. They often get distracted by objects (toys on the shelf, friends, their clothing), but with our encouragement, they are beginning to focus more fully on class discussions. We are encouraging them to participate more often and share their ideas throughout the day.

Lee shares their thinking about the books we read together as a group. Although they will sometimes shift their focus to objects (e.g. clothing), or simply look away from the book, they demonstrate in various ways that they understand what we’ve read. For example, they make predictions as we read, or point out connections to the text later in the day. This shows that Lee is able to follow and contribute to our conversation.

**Lee is a gender-fluid child whose preferred pronouns are “they” and “their”.*

Consider this ...

- How does focusing on what the child is able to do, rather than what they are not yet able to do, reflect our view of children as “competent and capable of complex thinking”?

What are some ways in which the comment on the right supports our evolving understanding of self-regulation and clarifies misconceptions about what self-regulation can look like and sound like? (See *The Kindergarten Program*, pp. 54–58.)

Moving From... Towards

<p>During our unit (inquiry) on butterflies Kadre asked many questions of her friends and the educators. She enjoyed learning about the life cycle of a butterfly and drew and painted many pictures of butterflies and caterpillars.</p>	<p>Kadre uses language for different purposes. She describes the steps she uses to make her pictures, asks questions to find out more information, and uses language to describe what she is thinking. For example, Kadre said, "I am going to add some more raindrops in my picture because it is raining really hard."</p>
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Consider this...

- In what ways does the sample on the right focus on the child’s learning rather than on the teaching?

Moving From... Towards

<p>At the beginning of the year Anthony often cried when he came into the classroom and often sat by himself. He was reluctant to join in during carpet time, or to join others in class activities. Recently we have noticed that Anthony no longer cries during the morning arrival and that he is beginning to join in during carpet time by clapping his hands during our songs. We will continue to encourage him to join the group. Anthony also enjoys drawing.</p>	<p>Anthony uses different strategies to keep himself focused and engaged in learning – for example, he is able to calm himself by letting himself cry and by using deep breathing. He contributes to groups by watching what others are doing and listening to their ideas. He shows his thinking about these ideas by drawing very detailed pictures. For example, Anthony’s drawing of the raccoons we saw eating on the sidewalk included the illustrations shown on the food container labels.</p>
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Consider this...

- In what ways might an asset-based view of a child’s learning change the educator’s description of strategies used by the child, and help to identify ways to support the child’s further learning?
- How does the sample on the right challenge assumptions about what self-regulation can look like and sound like? (See *The Kindergarten Program*, pp. 54–58.)

- With an asset-based view of a child’s learning, how might educators communicate to the child’s family some of the multiple ways, beyond talking, that the child is representing their learning?



<p>Sophia is beginning to participate more during our class carpet time. She often sits quietly alongside others in small groups, playing by herself. She likes to look at many different books in our classroom library, sometimes by herself and sometimes with others. We are encouraging her to talk more with her friends and contribute to our class discussions. Sophia often makes very complex patterns with pattern blocks. She also likes to draw pictures with some detail. With our prompting she will explain her patterns and drawings. We will continue to ask her questions to encourage her to talk more about her thinking so others can also hear her ideas.</p>	<p>Sophia studies the illustrations in books and then re-creates them, adding her own extra details. She uses materials such as blocks to build patterns and then create variations of those patterns. When she creates variations, she points to each block as she works to ensure that what she does on one part of the pattern she repeats on the other parts. That way, she makes sure the new pattern is still consistent. This demonstrates an understanding of how patterns work, known as “algebraic thinking”. Our photographs of Sophia’s process of building patterns, along with the photographs she’s taken herself of different patterns in the environment, show what she is thinking and learning.</p>
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Consider this...

- How might removing achievement-based language (e.g. use of qualifiers and developmental levels) enhance the focus on growth in learning?
- How does the descriptive language used in the sample on the right demonstrate an appreciation for this particular child and family?
- How does the sample on the right honour the fact that children may represent their learning in multiple ways?

Moving From... Towards

<p>Mohamud has improved his reading this term and is now reading at PM Benchmark level 4.</p> <p>He can print both lower- and uppercase letters correctly and uses the appropriate grip for his pencil and paintbrush. With encouragement from us Mohamud is able to write some simple sentences starting with a capital letter. For example, he wrote “I like my mom” correctly, and used high-frequency words that are familiar to him.</p> <p>Mohamud will be encouraged to continue his steady progress in both reading and writing in the coming term.</p>	<p>Mohamud knows that readers use different strategies to make sense of what they are reading. For example, he uses the illustrations or photos in books to help him figure out words in the text. He says, “I know that is the word ‘snowman’ because it is in the picture and it has an ‘s’.”</p> <p>In his own writing, Mohamud is also trying out some strategies from books he has read. When he made a drawing of centipedes, he counted the number of legs in the diagram in the book and made sure his own drawing had the same number. He also added a label, saying, “Look, it is just like in the book.”</p>
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Consider this...

- How does the sample on the right reflect the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016)?
- How does the language used by the educator in the sample on the right make this child’s learning as a reader and writer visible to his family?

Appendix B: Communicating Enduring, Evidence-Based Concerns

The [assessment] policy also recognizes that children enter Kindergarten at different stages of development and with diverse backgrounds and experiences, and that they will also leave Kindergarten demonstrating variations in growth and learning in relation to the expectations.

Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum, 2016, p. 3

When we as educators have enduring, evidence-based concerns about a child’s learning, how might we approach composing the written comments in that child’s Kindergarten Communication of Learning report? How might we supplement those comments with other forms of ongoing communication with the family?

As noted earlier, the Communication of Learning report may not be the appropriate place to communicate concerns. The sample comments below highlight the focus on the child’s current learning and shifts in educator thinking away from “We have concerns about this child and need to **show what the child is missing**” to “This is where the child is **currently, and this is our evidence** (what we see and hear)”. (These samples are meant to be taken as excerpts from a longer set of comments.)

As you read the samples, consider how viewing a child as competent and capable informs this shift in thinking, and think about other contexts where it might be more appropriate to communicate with families regarding enduring, evidence-based concerns.

Moving From... Towards

<p>Ethan [year 1] is in the early stages of literacy. He currently recognizes 4 of 52 upper- and lowercase letters. He sometimes chooses to look at books independently and appears to prefer non-fiction. Most of Ethan’s time is spent in the more active blocks, sand, and water centres. He rarely chooses to visit the writing centre. He does enjoy building large and detailed structures with a variety of classroom materials. We will continue to work with Ethan to help him learn his letters and make the connections to sounds. We are also encouraging him to print his name with all the letters, using upper and lower case letters where appropriate.</p>	<p>Ethan is showing a greater interest in design and details, not only in the structures he likes to build, but also regarding words in print. He has noticed that the letters in his name can be found in signs and labels in the classroom and outdoors. When reading a book by himself or with an adult, Ethan points to the letters he knows, makes other connections to his world, and asks questions. His current favourite books at school are non-fiction, and he talks about how he thinks things work as he looks at the pictures. We will continue to strengthen Ethan’s connections to print by supporting him in adding print to his daily activities (e.g., making a “Do not touch” sign for a block structure he has built and wants to come back to).</p>
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Consider this...

- How does the sample on the right maintain a focus on what the child is learning?
- How does the evidence in the sample on the right make the child’s unique patterns of learning visible?

Children develop at their own unique pace. What is the impact of evaluating young learners through an achievement lens (e.g., what level they have or have not achieved: “Ethan is in the early stages as a reader and writer, for example he is not yet able to print his name” or “Ethan is not yet at the expected level as a reader”), rather than focusing on the evidence of their learning and growth? Suppose that by the following school year, Ethan had learned not only to recognize all the letters, but also their function and how they are used in reading and in writing. If his Communication of Learning report in year 1 had included the comment on the left, what impact might that comment have had on how he was viewed as a learner even one year later by his family, educators, and himself?

What structures are currently in place, or could be put into place, around your ongoing communication with parents to support discussions about a child who is in the earlier stages of an area of development? How might these structures enable you to provide families with the information they need without disguising it in educational jargon, or creating labels by formalizing the information in a Communication of Learning report?

What were the shifts in thinking and practice of the educators who wrote the two samples above? How did the same child come to be described so differently in the sample on the right?

The educators reviewed the quotation that opens this appendix. This caused them to shift their view of Ethan. They approached their assessment from the stance that he was competent and capable.

In their assessment, the educators asked themselves how Ethan was interacting with the world as a literate learner, rather than asking themselves “How many letters does he know?” or, “Where is he on the reading and writing continuum?” They asked instead, “What literacy behaviours is Ethan demonstrating, and how can we describe his growth in literacy?”

Moving From... Towards

<p>Sara is able to choose books and use them to calm herself. She is able to find her favourite book and enjoys sitting to look at it in the reading tent. We are encouraging Sara to do this during activity time instead of 'tidy up time'. She is more challenged by transitions and choosing activities each day. With support, Sara can put her things away and find her marked spot on the carpet.</p> <p>With reminders, Sara is beginning to stay in one spot to play instead of wandering around the room. When she settles, she enjoys building with Lego, and comes back to it every day. We have started to use the classroom schedule with Sara to remind her of what she is supposed to be doing in the classroom. She sometimes needs educator support to follow directions.</p> <p>Next steps for Sara include following simple directions and following the classroom schedule more independently.</p>	<p>Sara has developed strategies that help her to plan her day and feel safe, calm, and part of the class. She moves through the room during the time for play and exploration. She stands along the edge of the area where children are playing and observes the children and/or the materials, or looks out the window. She is able to select a book to read and take it into the reading tent.</p> <p>Sara created a planning board with us to help plan her day and select areas she would like to explore. As we begin play and exploration time, Sara plans two or three areas where she would like to go in the classroom by putting a picture representing these areas on her planning board. When Sara appears to be finished in an area, we revisit her planning board together to determine what she would like to do next. Sara continues to select the reading tent and has added the creative area and construction area to her plans.</p> <p>Together with Sara, we will continue to monitor how her strategies are working to determine when and how to include more types of transitions on her planning board.</p>
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Consider this...

- How does the sample on the right make clear what this child's learning is, and what unique supports the child can access?
- How does the sample on the right describes what the *child* is doing rather than what the educators are doing?
- How does the comment on the right describe the next steps that will engage Sara in further learning, rather than what next steps the educators will take?
- Will parents and educators reading the comment know how the child is learning, and where to go next in the learning?

Educators consider the impact of focusing on specific needs and strategies to support children, rather than labelling them. Educators work in partnership with families to respond to children in ways that maintain children's autonomy as much as possible. Many of the strategies that educators develop for a particular child will evolve as the child's educators and family continue to gain an understanding of that child's needs.

In ongoing communication with a child's family, what are some other opportunities and processes to communicate concerns educators may have with regard to the child's learning and growth, based on documented evidence over time?

What were the shifts in thinking and practice of the educators who wrote the two samples above? How did the same child come to be described so differently in the sample on the right?

The educators considered that self-regulation "is about establishing one's own internal motivation for adapting to, and understanding, emotional and social demands. In fact, for many children, requiring compliance undermines their own abilities to self-regulate."⁵ They discussed what this means for a child, and for Sara in particular.

They considered, in discussion with Sara and her family, what unique strategies they could co-develop that would support her strengths and needs. The comment on the right is a more accurate representation of Sara, and was actually easier for the educators to write, as it was based on the daily evidence of learning with her.

⁵ Charles Pascal, *Every Child, Every Opportunity: Curriculum and Pedagogy for the Early Learning Program* (A compendium report to C. Pascal, [2009], *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*) (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009), p. 4, as cited in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016), p. 56.