

Preschool is more than babysitting – it's education ^[1]

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The Eastern Kings Early Learning Academy is located in the old, red-brick Rollo Bay public school, on the main highway just outside the town of Souris, on the eastern shore of PEI. It's here that many of the community's youngest children spend their day, climbing trees, splashing in water, mixing paint. They are the beneficiaries of the province's comprehensive new early-childhood education strategy, which has focused on regulating fees, improving staff training and creating a provincial curriculum that ensures parents are involved.

Despite the daycare centre's formidable name, teaching here is based on play. The desks have been replaced with activity centres, and the blackboards are covered in free-form art. In one room, certified educators are reading to infants; down the hall, preschoolers play a card-game version of Seven-Up. "They think they're just playing a game," says Lorraine McIntosh, the preschool supervisor, "but really what they are doing is recognizing their numbers and learning to take turns."

Occasionally, staff members will make a suggestion – a new colour to mix, a new player for the game – but they don't hover. "We get really irate when we hear the word babysitting," Ms. McIntosh says. It's education, she adds.

Krista MacKinnon, a nurse whose three children attend the centre, agrees: "As soon as we walk in, you get the feeling that they are going to learn something today."

Related link: The daycare project ^[2]

Region: Canada ^[3]

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