

# The Professional



*A Newsletter for the Early Learning and Care Professional, Creating a Bridge Between Research and Practice in the Field*

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## Embrace the Possibilities... Materials Matter Open Ended Materials & Loose Parts

By: Bev Laking , RECE

***"Materials in early childhood programs are the bones of the curriculum and the foundation of the teaching and learning process. They support what the program values, and frame the possibilities and actions for living and learning with children."***  
Curtis & Carter.

***"The materials have their own inner life and their own story to tell. Yet they can be transformed only through their encounter with people. When we leave room in construction with materials, leave silence or pause or breathing room, that helps the materials themselves to express what they can express."***  
Elena Giacopini

Take a moment and look around your room and take in the various materials that are available to children. How many of those items have a given purpose for how they should be used? How many can be transported and used in different areas of your program? How many could have more than one purpose?

As an Early Childhood Educator it is part of our role to provide materials and experiences that will foster children's learning and development. Are the materials that we offer doing this to the fullest extent possible? Do the materials encourage creativity, flexible thinking, and discussion amongst peers and adults? Do they encourage children to transport them from center to center depending on the child's choice of how they could be used? Do they foster manipulation, investigation, representation, and problem solving? Do they allow for the expansion of a play area if need be?

Think about the play that occurs in the block center. Children's block creations transform magically into something that has meaning and purpose for the child. The blocks may become a car, house, space ship, bed, store, road, animal, or ramp. It is easy for us to see the open ended possibilities here. The creative art area is another area in which children may have creative "rein" over what they choose to do with the materials there. There are many, many more ways though that our environments, and materials can better support the needs and learning of children. If we want children to be active, engaged learners who can problem solve, be creative, express themselves and reveal their knowledge and understanding of the world around them we need to rethink and revisit the materials that are available to them.

The term open-ended materials or loose parts are very common these days in the world of ECE. What does this mean for our environments? How do we take it beyond the Art area? (This is the area that most often has loose parts) Let's first determine what these words mean.

### **Open-ended Materials**

- Articles and items for children to explore and experiment with
- Lots of the same items
- Items that can represent many ideas of what they could be and what they could be used for
- There is flexibility in how the items could be used
- Materials that promote curiosity, problem solving, and creativity
- Encourages self-initiated play

## CCNWR AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

**Do you know someone who excels as an Early Childhood Educator?**

**Nominate them today!**

The following 3 annual awards are sponsored by the Child Care Network of Waterloo Region:

**- Teacher Award of Excellence**  
(working directly with children in a licensed environment)

**- Educator Award of Excellence** (has had a significant impact on the field of ECE)

**-Home Child Caregiver Award of Excellence**  
(a caregiver with a licensed home child care agency)

**Nominations due June 15th each year.**

Obtain information and nomination forms by:

-Logging onto the CCNWR website to obtain forms at [ccnwr.com](http://ccnwr.com)

-Contacting Joan Wagner  
Awards of Excellence  
Committee 519-741-0076  
[jwagner@kidslinkcares.com](mailto:jwagner@kidslinkcares.com)

**PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO RECOGNIZE THE DEDICATION AND PROFESSIONALISM OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR YOU KNOW!**



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Another area that blends in well with open-ended materials are items from nature. It is all too common to see how our environments are not providing enough of a reconnection back to nature which is all so important for the well-being of both children and adults. Consider the following to enhance your understanding:

**Add twigs, rocks, shells, feathers, leaves, driftwood, pinecones, stone, and other natural materials to activity centers.**

**In the BLOCK AREA, they become part of the building and architecture.**

**In the DRAMATIC PLAY AREA, they become food for people and animals.**

**On TABLES, children use them for counting and classifying.**

**In the ART AREA, they become part of children's sensory exploration, collage, and representations.**

*-Curtis & Carter*

To extend your understanding of the value of these types of materials, look through the lens of a child. This is what is happening:

**TODDLERS – AGAIN AND AGAIN, I DO WHAT I DO WITH THIS STUFF.**

**THREES – HEY! LOOK WHAT THIS STUFF CAN DO!**

**FOURS & FIVES – WHAT CAN I MAKE THIS STUFF BE? -Curtis & Carter**



The possibilities of what materials and where you could put them are endless. Here are a few suggestions to get you started and ones that I have found that reveal children's thinking and creativity. Provide scarves and large pieces of fabric with various colours, textures and patterns in Dramatic Play for clothing options. Sit back and watch what children transform these into. Remove the plastic foods from Dramatic Play. Replace them with labeled baskets of open-ended materials. It could be fabric scraps, cardboard pieces, bottle lids, pine cones, small polished stones, or shells. Children will begin to use their creativity and prior knowledge to transform these items.

On several occasions I observed children

turn long pieces of fabric scraps into bacon and spaghetti. Square pieces of thick cardboard became bread, toast, pancakes, and meat. Small polished stones became cereal, various berries, meatballs, and vegetables for a pot of soup. If we want children to connect to real foods, the best way is for them to actually try them; plastic foods have no meaningful connection to the real thing. A tray of colourful old marker lids became extended fingers, food for animals, and items that could be counted and sorted. Remove the tangram pattern cards and just put out the plastic or foam shape pieces. Invite children to create on their own. This then becomes an open-ended material. Children can also count, sort, and classify the shapes.

Begin a new journey for yourself in looking for open-ended materials. Look for items from nature, open yourself up to the possibilities in recyclable materials, and move your placement of these materials to beyond the art area. Observe closely what children do with these materials, they will guide you in the direction they want to go. Allow yourself to see their creativity and thinking. To continue on your own discovery journey feel free to access the variety of resources listed below.

### Resources

**Junk Makes Great Learning Materials:** <http://betterkidcare.psu.edu/Workbooks/JunkWkBk.pdf>

**Loose Parts: What does this mean?:**

<http://betterkidcare.psu.edu/TIPS/tips1107.pdf>

**I made a unicorn! Open-ended play with blocks and simple materials:**

<http://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/resources/downloads/i-made-a-unicorn.pdf>

**A Day in the Life of an Open-Ended Material:**

<http://etools.highscope.org/training/mod/resource/view.php?id=878>

### References

Curtis, Deb & Carter, Margie (2011) Reflecting Children's Lives. A Handbook for Planning Child-Centered Curriculum. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Redleaf Press.

Curtis, Deb & Carter, Margie (2008) Learning Together with Young Children. A Curriculum Framework for Reflective Teachers. Redleaf Press.





# The Mandala Experience

By: Shelley Secrett, RECE

## *A peaceful activity...*

Early one morning a meditative art experience was set up in the Rainbow Room at Emmanuel at Brighton Child Care to introduce the concept of mandalas to preschool children ages ranging between 4 and 6. Mandalas are a form of sacred art and they represent wholeness and balance. In Buddhist and Hindu traditions, monks spend weeks creating intricate sand mandalas only to brush them away upon completion, a reminder of the fleeting beauty of existence. The children at Emmanuel arrived to a calm classroom lit by lamps and the art table had several mandala colouring sheets to choose from along with soothing music from the CD player and a laptop showing a mandala meditation video with bursting colours and designs. As each child curiously came to the art table, I told them that we were

going to colour mandalas and that it would be a very peaceful activity. I said, "Do you notice that each mandala has a centre?"

I encouraged the children to point to the centre of their designs. I leaned in and whispered,

"That's where you make a special wish for your life. It's special only for you so keep it a secret. As you colour your mandala, I want you to be thinking about your wish." The children sat calmly colouring their own mandala and watching the meditation video. They kept letting me know when the meditation ended so that I could restart it for them. Even children who do not often choose to come to the art table were enthralled in this activity. Later when the whole group had gathered for circle, we discussed mandalas in greater detail to learn more about their meaning.

## *A child-centred approach...*

During the week following this activity I noticed a child cutting paper into a circle and creating a beautiful design. When she finished, she said, "Look Shelley, I made a mandala!" At Emmanuel at Brighton, we have blossomed over the past year with putting emergent curriculum into practice. "In this child-centred approach, play is at the heart of curriculum. RECEs support play with ample time, materials and coaching." (1) The idea of child-centred curriculum lets go of plans around traditional school topics, popular cultural holidays and pre-packaged seasonal curriculum themed books. Instead, one way curriculum is introduced is by ECEs sharing their own passions and interests which may end up being a source of children's interests as well. A few parents have since mentioned that their child will often talk about mandalas at home in their art or out in the world when they see circular forms. My passion for the peacefulness and meaning of mandalas made for a lasting positive impression in the minds of these young children.

## *A serendipitous moment...*

I truly doubt it was coincidental when I found a unique and

beautiful mandala puzzle at a nearby thrift shop for only \$1.50 on my lunch break. When the children gathered for circle time after their rest, I was very excited to say I had a surprise for them. I held up the puzzle box for them to see and I asked, "What does this look like to you?" Very quickly, several children responded excitedly, "a mandala!" I nodded and smiled and then asked the group if this would be a project that they would like to do together. I told them that the puzzle has 500 pieces and that there would need to be a lot of team work to complete it. I also said that this puzzle would take a long time to finish and that we must respect each other by not breaking it. The group agreed.

## *It takes a village...*

Throughout the month of April 2012 this group of mainly 4 and 5 year old children began this project to collaborate and complete this 500 piece puzzle which is 5 times larger than any

puzzle we have attempted. We started by collecting all of the outside edge pieces and setting aside the rest of the inner pieces. As you can see from the photos, this is a very abstract image and it was definitely a challenge. As the children would put a piece together, they got very excited and we gave those children high-fives. After a couple of days, I got the idea to add a teacher's bell to the table and whoever put a piece together would signal their success by ringing the bell. This was a hit for children and I have to admit it personally gave me a sense of satisfaction as well. The puzzle table had a mini white board with a stop sign and message that said, "Work in progress". The table was situated very close to the classroom door. We often had parents contributing as well by connecting some pieces when they were dropping off or picking up their children. It really became quite the community collaboration.



## *Take a close look at curriculum...*

When you take a few moments to consider how child development relates to this activity, you may be amazed at all the skills which were involved in accomplishing this puzzle. Throughout the process

of assembling this 500 piece puzzle the children were engaged in conversations which increase their confidence, attention to task, vocabulary and patience while developing their eye-hand coordination, memory skills, problem solving, spatial awareness, physical dexterity, ability to match patterns and recognize colours.

*Do you enjoying writing? Do you have thoughts or ideas you would love to share within the early learning community?*



Here at the PRC, we are always looking for individuals who are willing to share their stories with us in our monthly newsletter.

If this is something you are interested in, please contact *Melissa Bell* for more information: [Mbell@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:Mbell@conestogac.on.ca)



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The value of sharing in the experience of doing puzzles together with children is priceless. Not only do the children naturally gain countless of important skills but opportunities are created for social interaction and very happy childhood memories.



#### *A glimpse of the extraordinary...*

This entire mandala experience in the Rainbow Room has a much greater meaning beyond child development, curriculum and the classroom. These children were invited to participate in a project that through the process would give them a sense of community, expose them to the beauty of abstract art and introduce a new way to feel peaceful and be grounded. These are all incredible experiences and ways of being that they can take with them throughout their lives. Accomplishing this puzzle and hearing the last “ding” of the bell taught the children you can be part of something big and that each person has something valuable to contribute.

#### *At the centre of it all...*

At the heart of this mandala is the wish for loving friendships, the intention of caring community and the hope of lifelong learning and growth.

To leave you with an inspiring mandala meditation, please visit:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_xhP52E4cw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_xhP52E4cw)

#### References:

Curtis, Deb & Carter, Margie (2011) Reflecting Children's Lives. A Handbook for Planning Child-Centered Curriculum. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Redleaf Press.

**Were you inspired after reading this months article about Open Ended Materials?**

**Check out this list of materials you can add to your classroom and let the creativity SOAR!**

- Different sizes, textures, shapes, and colour of paper., carpet, plastic and metal
- Envelopes, folders
- Canvas
- Jar lids and milk bag tags
- Containers, jars, vases, and boxes
- CDs, CD cases
- Manufacturing scraps
- Packaging such as foam, Styrofoam, and bubble wrap
- Foam core and poster board (even if used on one side)
- Picture frame molding, corners, and mat samples
- Old film containers, thread spools
- Pieces from nature (Pinecones, leaves, twigs etc..)

Check out this video on [open ended materials](#)



**Are you interested in learning more about Mandalas? Here are some links to explore!**

[www.mandalaproject.org/what/index.html](http://www.mandalaproject.org/what/index.html)

[www.graphics.cornell.edu/~wbt/mandala/](http://www.graphics.cornell.edu/~wbt/mandala/)

[www.mysticalartsoftibet.org/Mandala.htm](http://www.mysticalartsoftibet.org/Mandala.htm)

## ***Special Notice from the PRC***

**On Wednesday June 13, 2012 the PRC will be closed at 5 pm for the AECEO General Meeting event.**

**We will be open for our regular hours back on Thursday June 14, from 9 - 5pm.**

**Thank you for your understanding.**





## What's New in Childcare

### Links to the News in Early Learning and Care

Promotional flyer:

[http://bit.ly/YouBetIStillCare\\_SurveyFlyer](http://bit.ly/YouBetIStillCare_SurveyFlyer)

You Bet We Still Care website:

[http://bit.ly/CCHRSC\\_SurveyInfo](http://bit.ly/CCHRSC_SurveyInfo)

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA on ECD: ATTACHMENT

Source: Centre of Excellence for ECD; Strategic Knowledge Cluster on ECD, May 2012

New information was added on ECD with the focus on attachment.

[http://bit.ly/EncyclopediaECD\\_Attachment](http://bit.ly/EncyclopediaECD_Attachment)

WATERLOO REGION, ON: FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN and BEFORE and AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM UPDATES  
Source: Waterloo Region District School Board, May 14, 2012

An update about the extended day program in the Waterloo Regional District School Board

[http://bit.ly/WRDSB\\_ExtendedDayUpdates](http://bit.ly/WRDSB_ExtendedDayUpdates)

## What's New at the PRC?

Are you looking for a new way for

your class to explore

their creative skills?

The *Buddha Board* is

just the perfect thing

to add to your class-

room. When you

draw on this unique

board (using only the brush and some water)

the children will be amazed to watch their

design slowly disappear and continue this

process again and again.



Another item new to our lending library is the *Totter Tower*. These bamboo rings create endless possibilities for build-

ing exciting shapes and structures and are a great way to encourage hand-eye co-ordination as well as spatial aware-

ness.

*Tactile Turn & Match* is another wonderful activity that the children in

your class will love to explore with their senses. Matching these various textures together will bring excitement to the sense of touch.



The last item we want to introduce to you is something that takes the idea of a marble

maze to a new whole new level! The *Perplexus Maze Game* is a wonderful addition to a school

age program and helps enhance the great skills

of both problem solving and hand-eye coordination.



### A Quality Initiative for Waterloo Region

For Further Information: Debbie Jones, Supervisor, Quality Initiatives  
Phone: 519-883 2111 x. 5044—Email: [djones@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:djones@regionofwaterloo.ca)



RTB Binder pick up & re-charge date:  
Thursday June 14th, 2012

#### Need your ECERS –R Training?

Two part training series available

July 3rd & 17th, 2012

At the PRC

Please check out [www.eceprc.ca](http://www.eceprc.ca) under the community calendar for more details



# Teambuilding and Leadership

6 pm—9 pm  
Rain or Shine

Wednesday June 13, 2012  
Shade's Mill Park, Cambridge

**Shade's Mill Conservation Park, 450 Avenue Road, Cambridge ON—Diamond Pavilion**

Working together for a common goal, embracing each others success, and understanding one another are the foundations of an effective team. Join us for this evening event out in the fresh air at a beautiful conservation park as we come together as early childhood educators and focus on building relationships, having fun, and bonding. Come by yourself or bring your own team for some interactive and meaningful activities that will pull out the leader from within, foster relationships, and create new bonds amongst other professionals in the field.

Amazing door prizes, and giveaways will be awarded throughout the evening. Come dressed for the outdoors, and be ready to participate in hands-on activities that will make you think, laugh, and above all, bring you closer to your team! Are you currently looking for a year- end celebration for your staff? This is the event that will have your centre talking for months to come! We look forward to seeing you all there—bring your own chair and we will bring the rest, including the marshmallows! Registration is open now—call today!

**AECEO Members can attend  
at no cost.**

**PRC Members \$5.00**

**General Public \$10.00**

**Fee includes entrance into the park,  
BBQ dinner, Activities  
and Campfire.**

**To Register for this event:  
Call 519-748-5220 ext. 3388  
[PRCregistration@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:PRCregistration@conestogac.on.ca)**







# Beginning with Books

Laura Dick, Waterloo Public Library and  
Laura Reed, Kitchener Public Library.

## Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image. For our purposes, visual literacy is all about the wonderful illustrations and pictures in children's books. It's about taking a picture walk through a great book and examining and talking about the illustrations with children. It's about taking the time to study the pictures and listen to a child's interpretation of what they see and process when looking at certain images. It's about paying close attention to both halves of a picture book – the story and the pictures. Looking at and understanding the pictures will help both you and the children you read with develop an understanding of the relationship between text and illustrations.

When you examine images in picture books with children

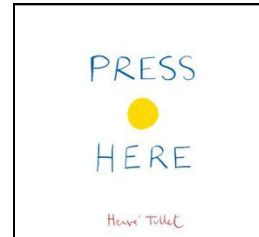
encourage them to think about some of the following:

- Whose perspective is this picture from?
- What does the picture tell us about the character's feelings, emotions and actions?
- How does this picture make you feel?
- How was this image created? Is it a painting, is it a photograph?
- How would you draw this picture differently?

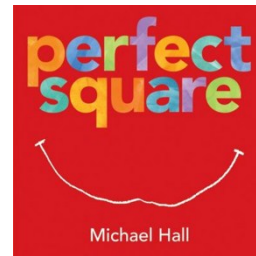
When thinking about visual literacy and using picture books with children, don't forget to look at the cover and front pages of the book as well as the endpapers and even the font and the title. Illustrators often use these places and these means as mediums for even more illustrative features.

There have been several books published recently that are particularly interesting visually.

Have a look at:



Press Here – Herve Tullet

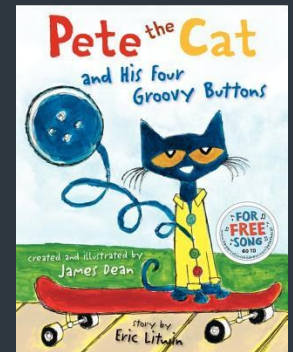


The Perfect Square – Michael Hall



And Then It's Spring – Julie Fogliano, illustrated by Erin E. Stead

## Children's Book - of - the Month



Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons

Our favourite cool cat, Pete is back! This time round, he's having some trouble with the buttons on his shirt. They keep popping off! Is this a problem for Pete? Of course not! Great for reinforcing numeracy concepts and good fun, too.

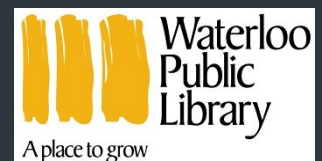
If you have any questions about books or early literacy, please send us an email:

[dick@wpl.ca](mailto:dick@wpl.ca)  
[laura.reed@kpl.org](mailto:laura.reed@kpl.org)

## Building a Community Through Early Literacy

Full Day Conference  
Saturday October 13th, 2012  
at Conestoga College

For more information visit: [www.elawr.org](http://www.elawr.org)



PROFESSIONAL  
RESOURCE CENTRE



**Spring Hours of Operation**  
Monday—Wednesday  
9am—8pm  
Thursday & Friday  
9am—5pm  
Closed Saturday and Sunday

**We will be closed on June  
13th at 5pm for the AECEO  
Annual General Meeting**

**Conestoga College**  
ECE Building  
299 Doon Valley Drive  
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4M4  
**519-748-5220 x. 3388**

# The Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre

*Tell a Friend Today!*

Did you know that being a member of the Professional Resource Centre is recognized as belonging to a professional organization? Our evidence based resources combine current research and quality materials to enhance your programs, and understanding of learning.

Our members receive a monthly newsletter, discounts on in-house workshops, lending privileges for our library and access to our data bank of research and early learning and care articles. Members also receive updates on current information in the ELC community and have access to our work stations and equipment (laminator, computer, binding machine, etc.)

Join today and discover the value of belonging to a professional organization that is invested in your professional growth, our community, and the future!



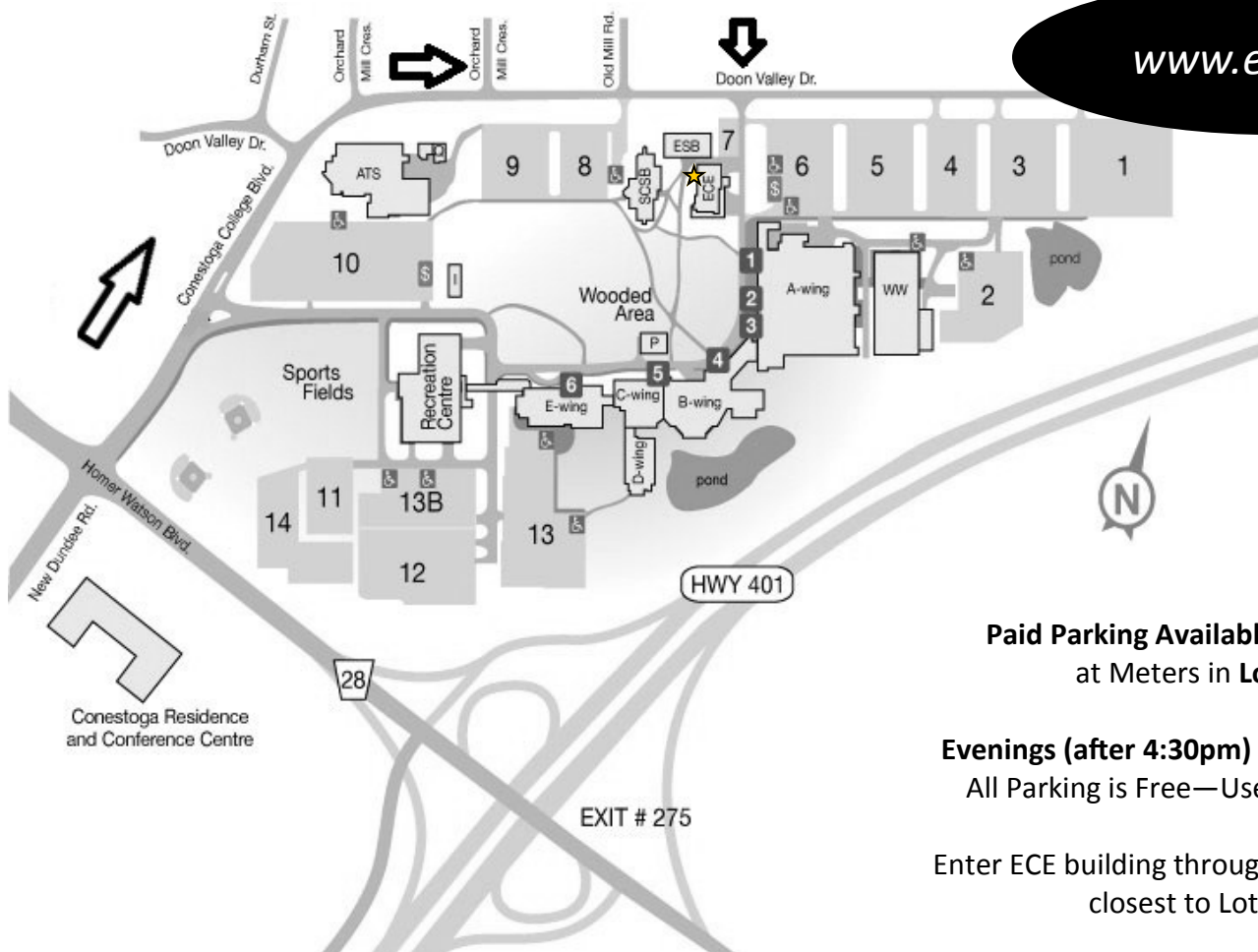
Region of Waterloo  
SOCIAL SERVICES  
Children's Services



**CONESTOGA**  
Connect Life and Learning



**LYLE S. HALLMAN**  
FOUNDATION



[www.eceprc.ca](http://www.eceprc.ca)

**Paid Parking Available (Mon-Fri)**  
at Meters in **Lot #6**

**Evenings (after 4:30pm) and Weekends**  
All Parking is Free—Use Lot #6 or #7

Enter ECE building through the side door,  
closest to Lot #7.