

# Interaction

VOLUME 30, NUMBER 1, SPRING 2016



## The Forest Preschool Movement in Canada

**It's Okay to Let Kids Play**  
**Examining Child Care through**  
**a Child-Centred Lens**

PUBLICATION OF THE CANADIAN CHILD CARE FEDERATION



# IT'S O.K. TO LET KIDS PLAY!

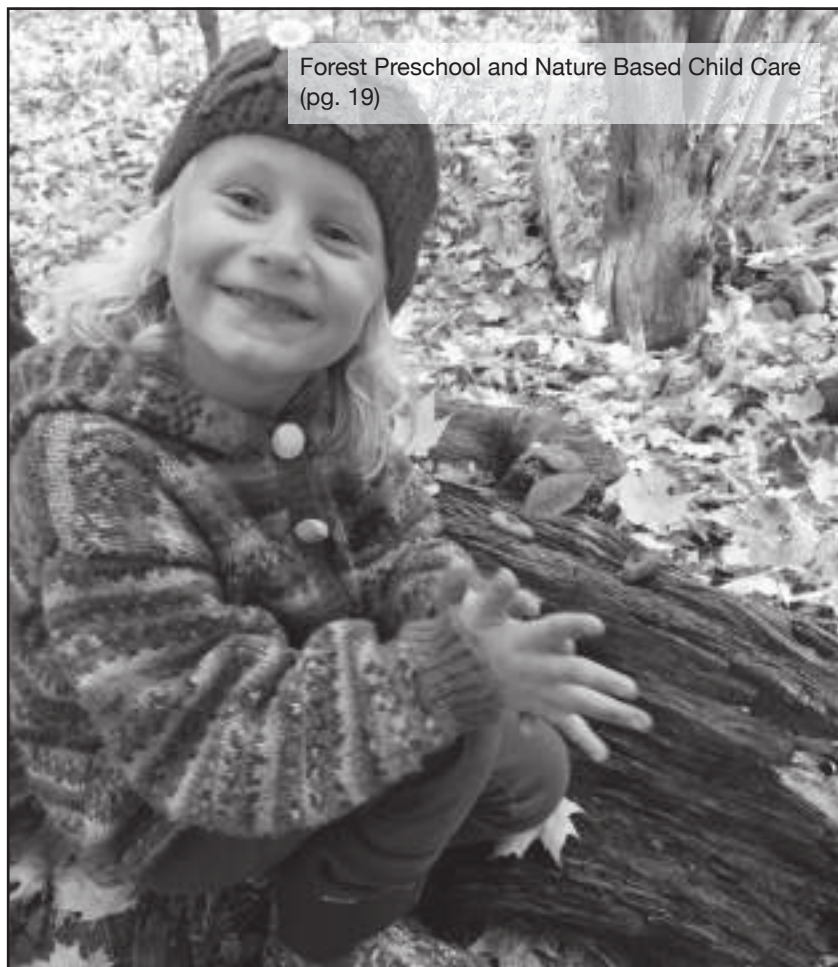
comic by  
Rebecca  
Rohrer



A message from the Child & Nature Alliance of Canada







Forest Preschool and Nature Based Child Care  
(pg. 19)

## Forest Preschool and Nature-Based Child Care

- 20** There are no expectations when you are in the woods: *Reflections of Forest School Training*  
**Denise Skuce**
- 23** Deeply Rooted Development: *Planting the seeds of inclusion and nature*  
**Kathryn Markham-Petro**
- 26** It's Okay to Let Kids Play: Forest and nature school, risky play, and early learning  
**Marlene Power**
- 29** Nature is Calling: Please Act  
**Dr. Diane Kashin, RECE**

## Departments

### OPINIONS

- 2** Behind the Scenes  
**Claire McLaughlin**
- 3** Inside the Federation
- 4** From Where I Sit: Examining Child Care through a Child-Centred Lens: Implications for Canada's *National Early Learning and Child Care Framework*  
**Terra Johnston**
- 7** Lawson Foundation Outdoor Play Strategy  
**Christine Alden**

### PRACTICE

- 9** Professional Development in Early Childhood Environments: Supporting intentional reflective practices through the integration of technology  
**Loris Bennett and Robin Lister**
- 13** Health Watch: What you need to know about concussions and your child

### IDEAS

- 14** The Early Childhood Practitioner's Role in Fostering Pre & Postnatal Development: *Pre & postnatal advocacy in early year's settings*  
**Tina H. Bonnett**

### NEWS

- 31** Across Canada and Beyond
- 32** Calendar
- 32** Research Updates
- 32** Resources

One new resource sheet accompanies this issue: #107 – *Your Family/Home Child Care: An Environment Checklist*



The photo for the front cover was taken by Mark Esping from Windsor, Ontario.

PUBLISHED BY THE CANADIAN CHILD CARE FEDERATION, 600-700 Industrial Avenue,  
Ottawa, ON K1G 0Y9; Tel: (613) 729-5289 or 1 800 858-1412; Fax: (613) 729-3159;  
Email: info@cccfc-fcsge.ca; Web: www.cccfc-fcsge.ca

Editor	Claire McLaughlin
Design	Fairmont House Design
Advertising	Claire McLaughlin
Translation	Diane Archambault/Min'Alerte Inc. Martine Leroux/SMART Communication
Printing	PSI Print Solutions Inc.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair	Marni Flaherty
Treasurer	Linda Skinner
Secretary	Christine MacLeod
Director	Taya Whitehead
Director	Cynthia Dempsey
Director	Christie Scarlett
Director	Joan Arruda
Director	Linda Cottes
Director	Cathy Ramos

### MEMBER COUNCIL

Alberta Child Care Association	Nicki Dublenko
Alberta Family Child Care Association	Rebecca Leong
Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador	Helen Sinclair
Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario	Ruth Houston
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	Mary Burgarella
BC Family Child Care Association	Carmen Barclay
Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia	Janice MacKinnon
Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick	Jean Robinson
Early Childhood Development Association of Prince Edward Island	Sonya Hooper
Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia	Carla Hees
Home Child Care Association of Ontario	vacant
Manitoba Child Care Association	Jodie Kehl
Northwest Territories Liaison	Elaine René-Tambour
Nova Scotia Child Care Association	Kathleen Couture
Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association	Jadranka Pocrnic
Yukon Child Care Association	Cyndi Desharnais

### STAFF

Chief Executive Officer	Don Giesbrecht
Publications Manager	Claire McLaughlin
Senior Consultant	Robin McMillan

CCCF is about the value of children. We value children.

In order to protect and enhance our children, to promote their safety and their healthy growth and development, we are committed to providing Canadians with the very best in early learning and child care knowledge and best practices.

Publication Mail Agreement #40069629  
GST Registration No. – 106844335 RT  
ISSN 0835-5819



## Behind the Scenes

Seven years ago, spring 2009, we published an issue of *Interaction* with the focus title: *Connecting Children to Nature – Our role in nurturing respect for the environment*. In that issue we looked at a forest preschool for the first time and how it operated. At the time, the forest preschool concept was very new, alternative, even “edgy” in Canada. While the forest preschool movement had already established itself in European countries, it was practically unheard of in Canada.

Today, all across Canada, we find forest preschools, forest and nature-based child cares and early learning programs that emphasize *outdoor play all day* for children in nature. Canada gets it now. The health benefits, as well as the psychological and social benefits of outdoor nature-based play, are confirmed through ample evidence in scientific, social and psychological research across many academic platforms. But as child care providers, we already knew that.

The forest preschool movement in Canada has grown up and evolved into a systemic pedagogical practice with training programs for early childhood educators to start their own nature-based child care programs or integrate outdoor, unstructured play and nature based learning into their existing child care programs. Many non-governmental organizations are implementing outdoor play strategies and policy into early childhood education programs through outreach and funding nature based programs. Many college and university programs with ECE programs now include courses and curriculum on nature-based child care.

Read about the forest school movement in Canada from the leader who pioneered it all in 2009, Marlene Power. Hear from early childhood educators who have taken forest school training and are applying what they have learned into their child care programs. And learn about how one child care provider sees how nature and outdoor programs help children in social development and inclusion.

With the newly elected government in Canada under the Honourable Justin Trudeau, there are renewed discussions about Canada's need for a national child care system and framework. As Canada contemplates this strategy, read *From Where I Sit, Examining Child Care through a Child-Centred Lens: Implications for Canada's National Early Learning and Child Care Framework*.

**Claire McLaughlin**, Editor, *Interaction*  
cmcloughlin@cccfc-fcsge.ca



## INSIDE THE FEDERATION

### CCCF Meets with New Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

On January 15, 2016, CEO Don Giesbrecht and CCCF Board Chair Marni Flaherty, along with national child care organization members of CRRU, CCAAC and Campaign 2000 met with the new Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Jean-Yves Duclos, his Parliamentary Secretary, Terry Duguid, and Carolyn Bennett, Minister, Indigenous and Northern Affairs. This meeting is the first Ministers meeting the CCCF has seen in 10 years and a positive start to working with our newly elected Liberal government to move forward on child care and early learning in Canada.

Minister Duclos confirmed his government's interest in collaborating with CCCF and other child care organizations to work inclusively with the provinces and territories and to consult with our sector and researchers on approaches to the role out of a national



CEO Don Giesbrecht and CCCF Board Chair Marni Flaherty along with national child care organization members of CRRU, CCAAC and Campaign 2000, with the new Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Jean-Yves Duclos, his Parliamentary Secretary, Terry Duguid, and Carolyn Bennett, Minister, Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

framework and social infrastructure spending for affordable child care in Canada. The CCCF and accompanying organizations offered their collective expertise on short term and long term solutions in funding, strategic approaches to building a national framework, strengthening the child care workforce and capacity building of national child care organizations all to support families in Canada with child care needs.

### New Blog: The Importance of Increasing Children's Outdoor Play Opportunities

CCCF has a new blog on its website — **A Blog: The Importance of Increasing Children's Outdoor Play Opportunities**, part of the Lawson Foundation-funded project with the Okanagan College. It will be updated and added to as more content is authored and created.

[www.cccf-fcsge.ca](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca)

This project will educate and inform the child care sector across Canada as to the value and importance of outdoor play for young children.

### Welcome New MC Reps

The **Alberta Child Care Association (ACCA)** has a new rep to the CCCF effective immediately as **Nicki Dublenko** takes over for Marlene Alcon Kepka. Nicki is the ACCA Chairperson, a member of the CCCF's Leader's Caucus in Alberta, and the Executive Director at Child Development Dayhomes in Edmonton. She was also just selected to be a participant in the Max Bell Institute for Public Policy in Calgary. Welcome, Nicki.

We would also like to welcome **Ruth Houston** as the new CCCF Member Council rep for the **AECEO**.

Ruth is the Program Manager at York Child Development & Family Services, Inc. in Newmarket, ON and we look forward to her involvement with the CCCF.

### Farewell

On behalf of the CCCF, we want to thank Marlene Alcon Kepka for her volunteerism, time and work on behalf of the CCCF and ACCA. We wish you well in your future endeavors.

Chanequa Cameron, who has been the Member Council rep for the AECEO for the past two years, is stepping back from the Member Council to focus on the completion of her thesis.

I would like to thank Chanequa for her time, work and dedication to quality early learning and child care for Ontario's—and all of Canada's—children. It has been a sincere pleasure to have her involved with the CCCF over these past two years.



FROM WHERE I SIT

# Examining Child Care through a Child-Centred Lens

## Implications for Canada's National Early Learning and Child Care Framework

by Terra Johnston

### Introduction

Despite the wide recognition of early childhood development as a key social determinant of health, and the protection of early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a child's right, through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, child care continues to be portrayed in today's Canadian discourse as, at worse, a threat to traditional family values and parental choice and, at best, a labour support issue for working parents (namely mothers). Seldom are child-centred considerations factored into the discussion, including the negative effects of poor-quality child care on children's development, and the potential of child care as a social justice equalizer that ameliorates systemic issues of inequity that many children endure.

A **child-centred lens**, developed by childhood theorists across many disciplines, inserts child-centred considerations into the policy-making process. By adopting such a lens, children are ensured their rightful place in the social order, which requires the consideration of all its members, not just its adult members.

**The objective of a child-centred lens is to expose and redress the ways in which children are disempowered in the social world, similar to the way in which a gendered lens reveals how women are disempowered in the social world. Without a child-centred lens, policies and practices are derived exclusively from adult-centric perspectives, which may – intended, or not – contribute to the oppression of children.**

The objective of a child-centred lens is to expose and redress the ways in which children are disempowered in the social world, similar to the way in which a gendered lens reveals how women are disempowered in the social world. Without a child-centred lens, policies and practices are derived exclusively from adult-centric perspectives, which may – intended, or not – contribute to the oppression of children.

### The View of the Child and Child Care Policy

According to Davidson (2010), the world view of the child has progressed along a property-welfare-rights spectrum of perspective. In Europe during the Middle Ages, children were viewed through a property perspective. Reflected in the legal principle of “reasonable chastisement”, parents had the right to subject their children to corporal punishment and dangerous work conditions. They could even sell their children into apprenticeship (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005). With uncontested parental power of control, children were considered the legal property of their parents (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2005).

With the child-saving movement of the 19th century, supports for children were met through a charity model determined on need and worthiness. This era reflects a welfare perspective whereby children were viewed as needy, broken, incompetent, at risk, and under developed. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a human rights perspective of the child first emerged, one which values children as citizens (not ‘citizens-in-the-making’), fully human, with a voice that must be listened to and rights that must be upheld through progressive social policy and a caring society (Hick, 2005).





One can see evidence of these perspectives of children when examining child care policy. When child care is framed as a labour support service, the child is viewed through a property perspective: young children are a burden (albeit, a welcome burden) to working parents for which they must find child-minding solutions. When child care is framed as a targeted program for the poor, the child is viewed through a welfare perspective: young children are the object of child-saving intervention. And, with its emphasis on maximizing the investment in children, the human capital frame of child care returns the view of the child to that of the property perspective: young children are underdeveloped resources to be nurtured and mined. Only when child care is embraced as a human right are children viewed as persons with full citizenship status and entitlement rights.

## A Child-Centred Lens on Child Care and Canada

Several countries in the OECD have developed domestic legislation to ensure child care as a universal right for all children irrespective of their family's employment or income status. Canada's child care policy approach has not paralleled this progressive movement. Its "patchwork" approach to child care has long been criticized for failing to ensure children's access to regulated child care space (Ferns & Friendly, 2014). In fact, coverage data suggests that there are only enough regulated child care spaces for 20 percent of young children in Canada. Moreover, 62 percent of Canadian children under age six who receive regular, non-relative care while their parents worked or studied, received such care in unregulated settings (OECD, 2006). This is a troubling statistic given the research that indicates the quality of care in unregulated child care settings is poorer compared to that of regulated child care (McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011).

There is much research to demonstrate that the calibre of child care young children receive has a lasting impact on their well-being and their success in learning (UNICEF, 2008). Researchers argue that impoverished families struggle the most to secure high-quality child care for their children, and suggest that the benefits of such child care may be reserved for children of affluent families while the harmful effects of poor-quality child care may fall to those from disadvantaged homes (UNICEF, 2008; Prentice, 2007). Such early disadvantage in children's lives perpetuates the cycle of inequity and entrenches a form of oppression called "generational discrimination" (Ravnø, 2009, p. 13): discrimination against parents (e.g., systemic barriers that preclude them from securing high-quality child care for their child) that cause a cycle of discrimination affecting their child (e.g., being denied the benefits of high-quality child care and having to access unregulated and

poorer-quality child care). Some theorists suggest that systemic adultism perpetuates generational discrimination against children whereby adult-centric legislations and policies fail to uphold children's rights.

## Child Care and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The children's rights movement recognizes that children "have agency; that they are participants in social processes; that they are persons not property..." (Freeman as cited in Smith, 2007a, p.151). Central to children's rights is the obligation of parents, guardians, society, and governments to create the conditions through progressive social policies wherein children can exercise their rights. The UNCRC reflects these important principles, and, with its nearly universal ratification, countries across the globe, including Canada, have entered into agreement to create the conditions in which children's rights can be truly honoured, including the right to child care.

*Article 18* of the UNCRC pertains to children's rights to child care, and sub-sections 18.2 and 18.3 specifically refer to the government's responsibility to developing child care services and facilities from which children may benefit. Further clarified in 2005, General Comment 7 urges state parties "to adopt comprehensive, strategic, and time-bound plans for early childhood within a rights-based framework. This requires an increase in human and financial resource allocations for early childhood services and programmes" (UNCRC, 2006, p. 52). General Comment 7 defines education and development as beginning at birth and calls for a child-centred approach to such early education whereby "the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (UNCRC, 2006, p. 173).

In Canada, the UNCRC is not incorporated directly into domestic law. As such, some have argued that it is without legal teeth, though many believe, including Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, that in ratifying this international treaty, Canada has entered into a commitment beyond simply a symbolic gesture. The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights is authorized by the Senate to make recommendations on how Canada can best implement the UNCRC and submits reports related to its progress. With regards to child care, the Standing Committee outlines a clear role for the federal government, recommending that it "meet with provincial and territorial governments to help coordinate the establishment of measurable standards and guidelines for delivering early childhood development and child care to children across the country, matched by adequate funding" (SSCHR, 2007, p. 145).



It is important to note that the Standing Committee does not simply *recommend* federal funding transfers to support the growth of child care services across Canada; it includes the call for measurable standards and guidelines to ensure a Canada-wide child care system built upon common principles. While its recommendations have not been acted upon since their release nearly ten years ago, there is a renewed sense of hope among child care advocates that Canada's new federal government will, at long last, answer its call to action.

## Concluding Thoughts

Through its commitment to work with provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to develop a *National Early Learning and Child Care Framework*, Canada's newly-elected Liberal federal government (2015) has a history-in-the-making opportunity to lead Canada toward a national child care program. It remains to be seen whether these levels of government will incorporate a child-centred lens to their work, and whether the resulting Framework will reflect Canada's commitment to the UNCRC through which children's rights to early childhood education and care are ensured. As previously cautioned, the failure to adopt a child-centred lens in the development of a national child care program may result in the unintended consequences of the oppression of children, including generational discrimination. Therefore, it is imperative that child-centred considerations of child care be brought to the forefront in policy-making. Only then will Canada finally honour its commitment to the UNCRC and uphold its promise to ensure all children receive their right to early childhood education and care.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

**Terra Johnston** has worked as a child policy consultant for the Government of Manitoba for 12 years specializing in the area of child care and early childhood development. She is a registered social worker with the Manitoba College of Social Workers, and is a PhD candidate with the Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba. Contact Terra at johnstt1@umanitoba.ca

## References

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. (2011). A Tale of Two Canadas: Implementing Rights in Early Childhood.

Davidson, J. (2010). A bully in the playground: examining the role of neoliberal economic globalization in children's struggles to become 'fully human'. *Social Justice and Global Development Journal*, (2), 1 – 15.

**It is important to note that the Standing Committee does not simply recommend federal funding transfers to support the growth of child care services across Canada; it includes the call for measurable standards and guidelines to ensure a Canada-wide child care system built upon common principles. While its recommendations have not been acted upon since their release nearly ten years ago, there is a renewed sense of hope among child care advocates that Canada's new federal government will, at long last, answer its call to action.**

Davis, M. & Powell, R. (2003). The international convention on the rights of the child: a catalyst for innovative childcare policies. *Human Rights Quarterly*, (25), 689 – 719.

Eichsteller, G. (2009). Janusz Korczak: His Legacy and its Relevance for Children's Rights Today. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, (17), 377–391.

Ferns, C. & Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*.

Friendly, M. (2006). Canadian early learning and child care and the convention on the rights of the child. Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto

Friendly, M. & Prentice, S. (2012). Provision, Policy, and Politics in Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada. In L. Prochner & N. Howe (Eds.), *Recent Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada* (pp. 50-79). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Hick, S. (ed). (2005). *Social work: a critical turn*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishers

Mayall, B. (2000). The sociology of childhood in relation to children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, (8), 243–259.

McCain, M.N., Mustard, J.F., & McCuaig, K. (2011). *Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action*. Toronto: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

Meyers, M., Rosenbaum, D., Ruhm, C. & Waldfogel, J. (2003). Inequality in early childhood education and care: what do we know? Russel Sage Foundation.

OECD Directorate for Education. (2003). Early childhood education and care policy: Canada country note. *OECD Directorate for Education*.

Prentice, S. (2007). Less access, worse quality. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 13(1), 57-73.

Ravnobol, C. I. (2009). Intersectional discrimination against children: discrimination against Romani children and anti-discrimination measures to address child trafficking: Innocenti working paper. Ball, 2012

Reynaert, D., Bouverne-de-Bie, M., & Vandeveld, S. (2009). A review of the children's rights literature since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Childhood*, (16), 518 -534.

Smith, A. (2007a). Children and young people's participation rights in education. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, (15), 147–164.

Smith, A. (2007b). Children as Social Actors: An Introduction. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, (15), 1 – 4.

Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (2005). Who's in charge here? Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of the children.

UNICEF. (2008). The child care transition: Innocenti Report Card 8. Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). A Guide to General Comment 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood.

Vandenbroeck, M. (2010). Participation in ECEC programs: Equity, diversity and educational disadvantage. In E. Baker, B. McGaw & P. Peterson (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (pp. 81-85). Oxford: Elsevier.

Wells, K. (2009). *Childhood in a global perspective*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

World Health Organization. (2008). Closing the gap within a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health.





# Lawson Foundation Outdoor Play Strategy

by **Christine Alden**

Program Director, The Lawson Foundation

In 2013, the Lawson Foundation started rethinking how we could help shift kids' behaviour towards healthier lifestyles. We decided to explore outdoor play as a lever to reverse the inactivity crisis and as an essential element to support healthy child development — the Foundation's ultimate goal.

We started by co-funding three academic papers (risky play, outdoor time, active outdoor play) and supported the convening of a working group to develop the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play* under the leadership of Dr. Mark Tremblay. The Position Statement was released to resounding positive media attention in June 2015 by ParticipACTION via the *Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*. This was followed by our funding call to identify projects that collectively would help inform how Canadian communities can increase children's opportunities for unstructured outdoor play.

For the next few years we will be working with organizations across Canada whose mandates range across physical activity, recreation, injury prevention, public health, early childhood education, environment, education, and mental health - all focused on children's outdoor play. Collectively the projects will produce tools, resources and training to build practitioner and decision maker capacity to support outdoor play, test delivery models for community implementation, and use research and evaluation to measure the effectiveness of various approaches.



Among the 14 funded projects in the Outdoor Play Strategy, we have five projects focused exclusively on early childhood education:

1. Okanagan College (in partnership with Ryerson University, Lethbridge College, Northern College, the Justice Institute of BC, and the Canadian Child Care Federation) is developing an *on-site and online outdoor play training resource* for ECEs that will be widely available at no cost to users.
2. Dalhousie University is investigating how a *loose parts intervention* might foster improved physical literacy skills and other developmental benefits among 3-5 year olds in Nova Scotia early learning and care programs. (*Loose Parts materials in outdoor play are those that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways*).
3. In Edmonton, the Glenora Child Care Society is exploring *winter play* in its early learning and care program.
4. The YMCA of Western Ontario (in partnership with the national YMCA office) is developing *outdoor and risky play enhancements to the national YMCA Playing to Learn curriculum* through three London, Ontario early learning and care sites.
5. In Québec, the Regroupement des Centres de la Petite Enfance de la Montérégie is working with six early learning and care centres to *re-design their outdoor play spaces, enhance ECE training and evaluate child outcomes*.



In addition, Ecosource is offering *loose parts play in a community garden setting* for children 0-12 years of age, and Earth Day Canada is leading a process to support school communities (including kindergarten and on-site child care programs) to *enrich the play opportunities of recess*.

Finally, the Lawson Foundation's commitment since 2014 to support the Forest and Nature School movement in Canada continues to grow and fits in this Outdoor Play Strategy. The Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, through its key program area, Forest School Canada, is delivering professional learning from coast to coast to early childhood educators and elementary school teachers through the Forest and Nature School Practitioners' Course. This course dives

into the pedagogy of play-based and emergent curriculum in nature, as well as the practical components of delivering Forest and Nature School in a variety of education settings.

Follow <https://www.facebook.com/lawsonfoundation> to learn more about the funded projects and the Lawson Foundation Outdoor Play Strategy. While there is no further funding available, please join our mailing list for updates on what we're learning! And follow us on social media at [https://twitter.com/Lawson\\_Fdn](https://twitter.com/Lawson_Fdn).

**The Lawson Foundation** is a national family foundation with a mission to invest in and engage with ideas, people and organizations that contribute to healthy outcomes of Canadians throughout their life course. Its overall focus is on the well-being of children and youth and it invests in three inter-related strategic areas that they believe will have a significant impact on young people's healthy development: early child development, healthy active living, and a new area of interest, children and the environment. [www.lawson.ca](http://www.lawson.ca) | Strategic Direction

## Donate Online

Support CCCF through an online donation. With a click of a mouse you can contribute monthly or lump sum donations. Tax receipts will be issued for amounts of \$10.00 and more.

Visit the CCCF website ([www.cccf-fcsge.ca](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca)) and click on "Donate Now!"



CANADIAN CHILD CARE  
FEDERATION  
FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE DES  
SERVICES DE GARDE  
À L'ENFANCE







# Professional Development in Early Childhood Environments

## Supporting Intentional Reflective Practices Through the Integration of Technology

by Loris Bennett and Robin Lister

*The purpose of this pilot study was to explore the use of technology as a tool to support the Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) in intentional reflection on their every day practices. The RECE's were videotaped interacting with children. These videos were used by the RECE's to engage in self-reflection related to their interactions with children. This process was further supported by the Special Needs Resource (SNR) professional through coaching and mentoring feedback with the RECE.*

### Background

The current climate of accountability for outcomes and policies in the field of early childhood education requires RECE's to be well grounded and knowledgeable in child development as well as provide meaningful evidence based educational experiences for children in diverse learning environments (Sheridan, et al., 2009). Ryan, Hornbeck and Frede (2004) posited that traditionally, professional development (whereby teachers attended workshops to learn new topics related to their practice) should not preclude ongoing opportunities for teachers to practice new ideas in their classrooms, with the help of skilled colleagues (Ryan, Hornbeck



and Frede, 2004). Prolific researchers (Sheridan, et al., 2009) point to the growing trend in collaborative relationships between professionals, as similarly prescribed in the service delivery model outlined by Toronto Children's Services. The aforementioned provides the framework for this process to develop and foster coaching and mentoring relationships, to optimize quality programs, and service delivery in early childhood settings (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009).

The intertwining of policies, procedures, and legislations, such as Toronto Children's Services Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) and the Early Learning Framework speaks to the experiences and outcomes for young children in licensed child care settings. These outcomes are largely dependent on high quality programs, and the highly skilled RECE's delivering those programs. The Early Childhood Educators Act of 2007 identifies the need for the RECE to keep abreast in professional knowledge and to be lifelong learners through engagement in continuous professional development (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2014). Therefore, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities and Toronto Children's Services has identified a key role of the SNR professional is to support the RECE in their reflection, evaluation, and



development of positive interactions with young children for the purpose of insuring high quality licensed child care settings. Traditional consultation methods are useful in achieving this goal. However, research shows that integration of technology to assist in the process of mentoring/coaching with the RECE will expand the realm of tools available to achieve the goal of meeting the needs of children (NAEYC, 2011). Harwell (2003) posited that technology affords a useful tool for accessing and supporting various means of professional learning.

Technological advancement is transforming early childhood settings, efforts in developing teachers' skill sets in the appropriate use of these tools, the right circumstances for the use of technology, and to utilize these tools within the framework of developmentally appropriate practices are essential in ensuring teachers' efficacy ("Technology and interactive media in early childhood programs", 2012). Blackwell, et al., (2013), purported, that despite increased access to technology, teachers underuse these tools. As such, it is important to understand the barriers teachers face in incorporating technology in early childhood environments; and effective strategies to support efficacy. Blackwell, et al., (2013) noted that the association between professional development and increased use of technology could shift teachers' attitudes towards the developmentally appropriate use of technology (Blackwell et al., 2013). Pegrum, Howitt, and Striepe (2013) supported the aforementioned statements and highlighted the facilitation of preservice teachers' use of technology, including the use of videotape, in developing an understanding of content and pedagogy. These findings are relevant in programs providing early childhood education training, and necessitate the need to purposively incorporate technology during students' training to provide ample opportunities to familiarize students in the use of technology in their daily practices (Pegrum, Howitt, and Striepe, 2013).

Research on professional development shows a shift from the traditional modes of training (NAEYC, 2011); consequently this study forges a path to a collaborative process for the RECE and the SNR to engage in hands on training and practices in the classroom, while providing feedback to the RECE. Collaborative initiatives engage RECE's, through reflective practice and disciplined inquiry

in their practice, while working to improve the quality of their professional goals (NAEYC, 2011). The use of technology, specifically videotaping for feedback could be a tool to support intentional reflection, by providing the RECE with objective evidences for reflection.

## Objectives

The three aims of this study were to 1) explore the use of technology as a tool to support the RECE to engage in intentional reflection, 2) enhance the SNR's ability to coach/mentor the RECE, and 3) access to a tool to support effective consultation with the RECE.

## Methodology

### Participants:

- Two RECE's from licensed child care centres in the Scarborough community
- Two Early Childhood Resource Consultant (ECRC) Post-Diploma students as student researchers

### Measures:

- Five 15-minute videotaping sessions were completed with each RECE.
- Self-reflection by RECE and coaching/mentoring interaction with the ECRC student researchers.
- Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used to determine the RECE's and ECRC students' perspectives on coaching/mentoring, professional development, reflective practices, and their knowledge and use of technology in practice.







- Semi-structured follow up interviews with the ECRC students with respect to their experience with the use of technology to enhance coaching/mentoring strategies.
- Hands-on training of the participants, both RECE's and ECRC student researchers, with regards to appropriate use of technology was completed prior to the implementation of the study.
- The seven indicators related to RECE/child attunement and interaction identified in Toronto Children's Services' Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) were adapted for this project.

## Findings

The findings for this study cannot be generalized; this was a small sample and purposely selected. The aim of this pilot study was not to generalize findings across early childhood education settings, but to explore how this strategy could be useful in these two specific licensed child care settings. Participant anecdotal reports highlight the benefits of using technology to enhance intentional self-reflection. Participants in the study reported an increased confidence in engaging in reflective practices and a desire to utilize technology in their practice in the future. Correspondingly, the participants noted the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the AQI in their respective roles as Early Childhood Educators and Special Needs Resourcing staff. Furthermore, the participants commented on the value of the study and expressed a desire to engage in similar processes in the future.

The RECE's were able to reflect on their interactions with children and identify areas for improvement based on the

AQI indicators (see Figures 1 and 2). Over the five-week period of videotaping the number of self-identified areas for improvement generally declined in each of the categories of AQI indicators. Simultaneously, the RECE's were able to spontaneously develop solutions and plans while interacting with the children, resulting in fewer items to be identified during the viewing of the videotape, thus demonstrating the RECE's increased ability to reflect on their practice.

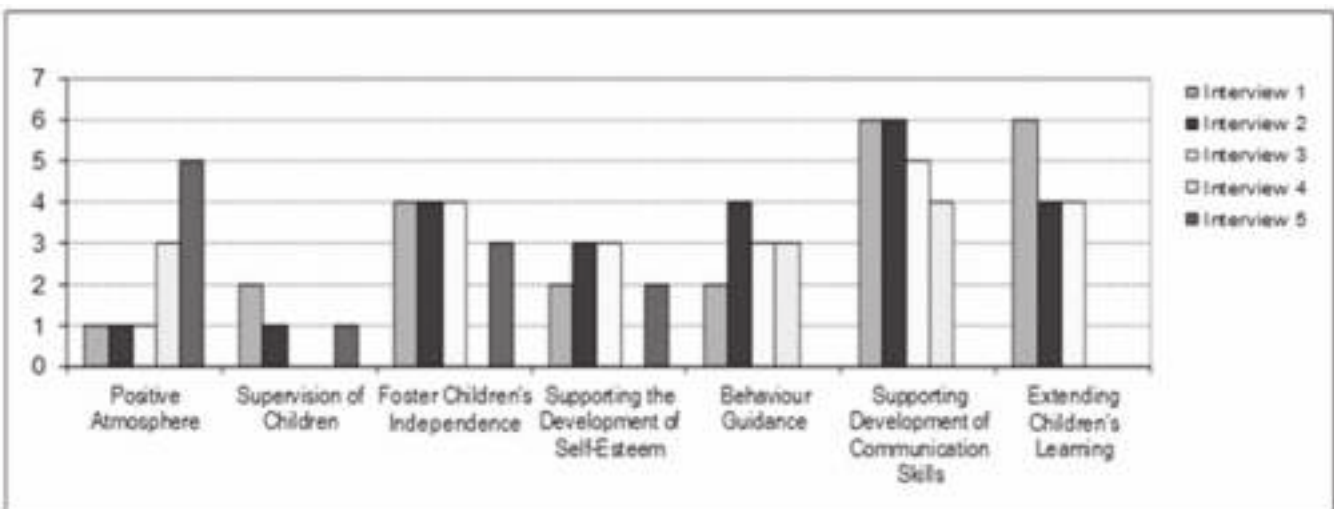
## Conclusions

Findings indicate the use of technology in the identified settings was an effective tool to increase RECE intentional reflective practice, particularly when there was prior use and/or training with the technology. The SNR professional's coaching/mentoring process with the RECE was enhanced by the use of technology which allowed for unbiased observation that supported the RECE's self-reflection on their interactions with the children. The post-interviews of the participants indicated a desire to integrate this experience in their everyday practice in their child care settings.

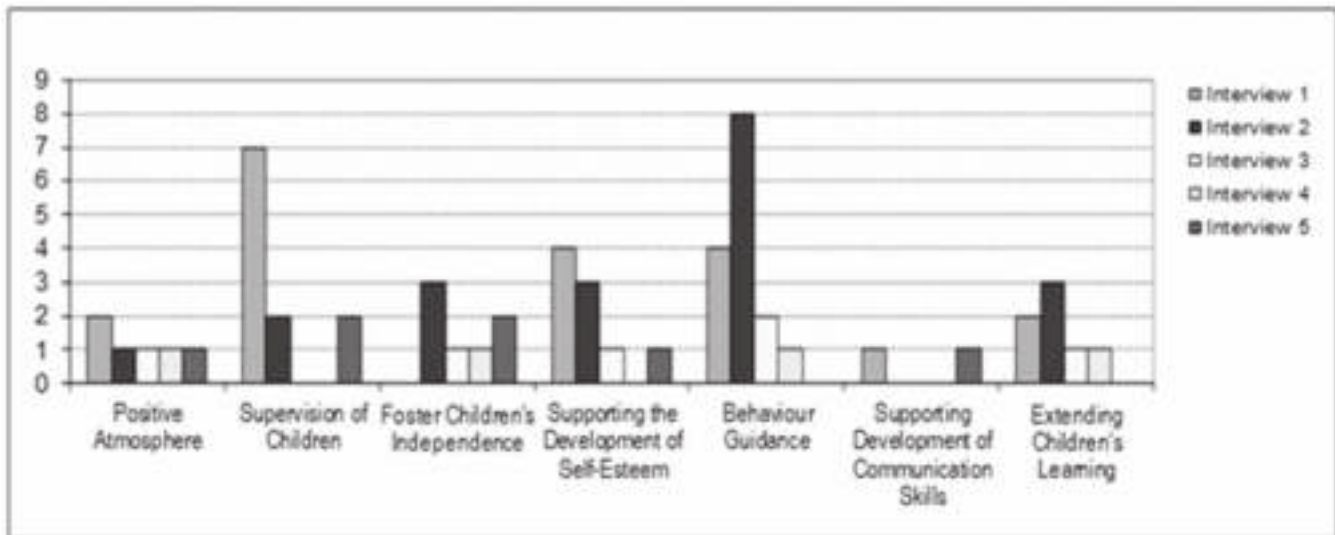
## Implications for the Future – ECRC Students

Including this consultation process in the curriculum of the Early Childhood Resource Consultant program will create an additional skill set for ECRC students to develop prior to graduation into the field of special needs resourcing. The evidence showed a greater understanding of planning according to the AQI standards for positive interactions with young children. This aligns with Toronto Children's Services' (2014) description of the role of the special needs resourcing

**Figure 1: Registered Early Childhood Educator Self-Reflection**



Note: Participant 1 - The Registered Early Childhood Educator's self-reflection and identification of needs in alignment to the Assessment of Quality Improvement indicators of quality in child care environments.

**Figure 2: Registered Early Childhood Educator Self-Reflection**

Note: Participant 2 - The Registered Early Childhood Educator's self-reflection and identification of needs in alignment to the Assessment of Quality Improvement indicators of quality in child care environments.

professional in supporting the inclusion of young children in licensed child care centres. As such, SNR professionals must be supported in their learning to appropriately utilize technology as a tool for coaching and mentoring of RECE's.

## Implications for the Future – ECE Students

The opportunity for ECE students to achieve mastery in the skill of intentional reflection is critical to the knowledge they will need to successfully practice in the field. The use of technology and supporting guidelines, in the early childhood education environment is an important tool for the ECE student's learning with regards to their interactions with young children. The integration of technology into curriculum to meet the current trend in teaching and supporting the learning of intentional reflection will add to the preparation of ECE students to enter the field. Therefore, ECE faculty should work to integrate the use of technology to support observation and intentional reflection into the curriculum to optimize the ECE students' readiness for practice.

Loris Bennett, M.A., is an Early Childhood Consultant and a faculty in Centennial College's Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Resource Consultant programs with over 30 years of experience in the area of inclusion. She has a particular focus on training related to inclusive practices and individuals with learning disabilities. She is trained in the use of the CLASS observational tool for Pre-K – grade 3 classrooms with a focus on professional development for early Pre-K and primary teachers. Loris has presented at international symposiums focusing on professional development of early childhood educators inclusive practices in the Caribbean and lower income countries.

Robin Lister, RECE, AECEO.C, B.A., R.T., is a Special Needs Consultant and a faculty in Centennial College's Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Resource Consultant programs with over 25 years of experience supporting the inclusion of children with special needs in licensed child care settings. Her specific focus on coaching/mentoring techniques is utilized for the purpose of capacity building with Registered Early Childhood Educators. Robin has presented extensively on subjects related to the promotion of the social/emotional development and well-being of young children.

## References

- Bertrand, J., Bernhard, J., Blaxall, J., Burning Fields, J., Gordon, M., Goulet, M., Greenberg, J., Latulippe, J., Littleford, J., Maltais, C., Pelletier, J., Schmidt, B., Varmuza, P., and Zimanyi, L. (2007). *Early Learning Framework*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Blackwell, C., Lauricella, A., Wartella, E., Robb, R., and Schomburg, R. (2013). Adoption and use of technology in early education: The interplay of extrinsic barriers and teacher attitudes. *Computers and Education*, 69(3), 310-319. doi: 10.1016/j.compedu.2013.07.024
- College of Early Childhood Educators. (2011). *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. Toronto, ON: College of Early Childhood Educators.
- College of Early Childhood Educators. (2014). *Continuous Professional Learning Handbook*. Toronto, ON: College of Early Childhood Educators.
- College of Early Childhood Educators. (2014). *Reflective Practice and Self-Directed Learning*. Toronto, ON: College of Early Childhood Educators.
- Harwell, S. H. (2003). *Teacher Professional Development: It's not an Event it is a Process*. Retrieved from <http://www.cord.org/uploadedfiles/harwellpaper.pdf>
- Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2012). *Early Childhood Education – Resource Consulting Program Standard*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- NAEYC. (2011). *Early childhood education professional development Training and Technology Assistance Glossary* [Educational Standards]. New York, NY: NAEYC. Retrieved from [http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining\\_TA.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/GlossaryTraining_TA.pdf)
- NAEYC. (2012). *Technology and interactive media in early childhood programs*. New York NY: NAEYC. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/content/technology-and-young-children>
- Pegrum, M., Howitt, C., & Striepe, M. (2013). Learning to take the tablet: How pre-service teachers use iPads to facilitate their learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 29(4), 464-479.
- Ryan, S., Hornbeck, A., & Frede, E. (2004). *Mentoring for Change: A time used study of Teacher Consultants in Preschool Reform*. Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/6n1/ryan.html>
- Sheridan, S., Edwards, C.P., Marvin, C.A., & Knoche, L.L. (2009). Professional Development in Early Childhood Programs: Process Issues and Research Needs. *Early Education Development*, 20(3), 377-401. doi:10.1080/104092808022582795
- Toronto Children's Services. (2014). *Toronto Children's Services' Assessment for Quality Improvement*. Toronto, ON: City of Toronto
- Toronto Children's Services. (2014). *Toronto Operating Criteria for Agencies providing Special Needs Resourcing*. Toronto, ON: City of Toronto.





## HEALTH WATCH

# What you need to know about concussions and your child

by Dr. Peter Rumney

It's important to recognize a concussion and realize that every child's concussion experience is unique.

A head injury can happen to anyone — from a slip on the ice or car crash. Head injuries caused by falls are especially common in children who are learning about the world, to walk, or ride a bike.

Most injuries are minor, resulting in bumps or bruises. A mild brain injury that causes a concussion is more serious and can temporarily affect the way the brain processes information and controls the body. For children who have young developing brains and small necks, this is especially true. Thankfully, severe traumatic brain injuries that render a person unconscious for hours or days are rare.

As a physician who treats children and youth with traumatic brain injuries of all severities, I can't stress enough the importance to recognize a concussion and realize that every child's concussion experience is unique.

A helpful way to identify concussion symptoms is to think of them in four categories:



1. Physical: headaches, nausea, dizziness, increased sensitivity to light and noise
2. Mental: foggiess and difficulty concentrating and remembering
3. Behavioural: irritability, nervousness, anxiety, anger or sadness
4. Sleep: difficulty in sleeping or sleeping more than usual

If you recognize any of these symptoms after a significant head injury, it is important that you take the following steps:

- Get help: Seek immediate medical attention if your child has experienced a significant injury.
- If a concussion is diagnosed, then manage the symptoms as directed by your health-care professional.
- Take it slow: Return to school, work and play gradually after approval is given. Share information about the injury with your teacher, school administrator and coaches. School boards in Ontario have each developed a concussion recovery protocol to help students properly return to learn and to play.
- Once the initial phase of recovery has been completed, gradually increase activity levels to improve strength, endurance and confidence.
- Recovery times vary from days to weeks, and sometimes months. Allowing your child to do too much too soon can prolong this time.

To guide parents and kids in managing a concussion, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital recently developed a concussion handbook offering practical advice.

Dr. Peter Rumney is an assistant professor in pediatrics at the University of Toronto, the physician director in the department of rehab and complex continuing care and the co-director in the center for leadership in brain injury at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.



facebook

Join us on Facebook.com



# ideas

Emotional Well-Being in Child Care



## The Early Childhood Practitioner's Role in Fostering Pre & Postnatal Development

Pre & postnatal advocacy in early year's settings

by Tina H. Bonnett

As early childhood practitioners we are in a unique position in that we often have daily contact with families who may be expecting a baby. Typically, parents' connections with early childhood educators occur once their first born child enters the world of group care. During the initial interactions we, the early childhood practitioners, habitually assume that families are well versed and experienced in the areas of pre and postnatal development. Although at times this is an accurate notion, it may not always be the case. It may be common for couples to feel overwhelmed with their first pregnancy thereby limiting their ability to seek well-informed pre or postnatal care. It may also be typical for families to seek out alternate care options with their subsequent pregnancies, labors and deliveries; especially if they find their

**Historically, society has viewed early intervention as commencing within the first few years of a child's life. In present day however, early intervention resonates with many as being established during the pre or post-conception stages of development. One of the most notable post conception themes of early intervention is that of *brain development*.**

previous approach or experience to be unsatisfactory or unfulfilling in any way. This is where we, as early childhood practitioners, can play a pivotal role in assisting to shape longitudinal health and wellness outcomes for the unborn child or the newly born child and their family.

Although, as early childhood educators, we are not extensively trained or skilled in pre and postnatal care, we have a responsibility to embrace a foundational understanding of the pre-natal critical period of development and equip ourselves with the knowledge of associated resources. While the

professionals in early years vocations are not qualified to offer medical advice or replace routine care of a physician, this should not preclude them from contributing to the health and wellness of the child. Professionals engaged in early year's practice recognize and respect that not all families are comfortable in sharing their pre and postnatal journey. However, as a profession that prides itself in fostering family-centered, relationship-based practice, we are frequently afforded opportunities to develop trusting, long-term relationships with families. With these relationships often arise opportunities for sincerely and actively implementing an early intervention model of care.

### Early Intervention

Historically, society has viewed early intervention as commencing within the first few years of a child's life. In present day however, early intervention resonates with many as being established during the pre or post-conception stages of development. One of the most notable post conception themes of early intervention is that of *brain development*.

Considering that 100 billion neurons are wired in an infant's brain in-utero (National Geographic, 2013), it is essential that families are given opportunities to consider and reflect upon this science prior to, and/or in the initial stages, of pregnancy. What a preventative measure it can be when educators stimulate dialogue with families whereby information focusing on the embryonic brain can unfold. Given that the infant brain eventually houses a quadrillion neurons—more than there are stars in the galaxy!----and that in the first year of life an infant's brain doubles



in size (National Geographic, 2013), it is imperative that parents are given information related to this topic in a timely manner. Relationship-based strategies, such as eye and skin contact, reading and responding to cues sensitively and fostering early self-regulatory skills, all contribute to brain development in the formative years of life and are worthy of discussion between families and educators.

The impact of *teratogens* on the unborn fetus is another facet of early education that is sometimes overlooked by early childhood

professionals. Diseases, drugs and environmental hazards have been linked to a host of pregnancy complications such as neurological disorders, lower birth weight, cognitive disorders, heart damage and fetal alcohol affects (Kail & Barnfield, 2013). Some expecting families are cognizant of the link between teratogens and the developing fetus, while others have not been afforded opportunities to learn about the ways in which diseases, drugs and environmental risks can jeopardize their child's growth and development. For those who have not



had opportunities in their earlier pregnancies to ascertain knowledge regarding teratogens, the early childhood educator may become the resource to bridge this gap in knowledge.

Distribution of information regarding the prevention of *neural tube defects (NTD)* is another way in which early childhood practitioners may contribute to healthy pre and postnatal development. Neural tube defects, namely spina bifida, affect 6 to 12 fetuses per 10,000 births in Canada (Ray, Wyatt, Thompson, Vermuelen, Meier, Wond, Farrell & Cole, 2007). Folic acid, when taken orally, has been proven to aid significantly in the prevention of neural tube defects, especially when administered in the pre-conception phase and through the first trimester of pregnancy. Unfortunately, only 40% of pregnant women report consuming the recommended daily intake (Green, Ehrhardt, Ruttenber & Olney, 2011), and many families acquire this information only after conception; when the critical phase of development has already transpired in the unborn child's nervous system. In second and subsequent pregnancies, where a mother has given birth to a first child with a NTD, a reduction

of incidence has been shown to be as high as 87% when 14mg of folic acid is taken daily (Green, Ehrhardt, Ruttenber & Olney, 2011). By engaging in open dialogue about this topic and connecting families to professionals or agencies who are experts in this area, the early childhood specialist can contribute to minimize the occurrence, or reoccurrence, of neural tube defects in children.

### Attachment, Post-Partum Depression & Breastfeeding Advocacy

*Attachment* in the infant/parent dyad is an additional pre and postnatal theme that the early childhood professional can promote in an effort to support the health and wellness of children and families. In light of the fact that only 50-65% of children across many sampled countries are securely attached to their parent(s) (Benoit, 2002), it is warranted that educators talk about, model, and share the current content on secure attachment relationships. Education and prevention are key, when it comes to promoting attachment in the parent-child dyad, as "secure attachment is thought to have a protective effect

on later development and insecure attachment is a risk factor for later problems" (Benoit, 2002). Early childhood educators are well positioned to share attachment-based theories and strategies with families. When educators understand attachment-based theories, patterns, behaviors (namely reunion/strange situation behaviors), and strategies to enhance security of the young child, they can effectively transfer this knowledge to parents who have not yet had opportunities to experience secure relationships themselves. Consequently, the long term outcomes for the child may be favourably impacted.

In light of the fact that early childhood practitioners typically have contact with mother's who are dropping their child off to the toddler or preschool room with a newborn child in arm, opportunities often exist to identify *post-partum depression*. While professionals in the early year's field are not trained to diagnose medical disorders, they often have the opportunity to engage in conversations with mothers who have recently given birth. Paying attention to subtle signs indicative of post-partum depression may allow practitioners to share relevant resources with families in a



timely fashion. Across studies, maternal depression has been found to range in prevalence from 10 to 50% (Landy, 2002), and it is even higher in instances where the mother faces challenges such as minimal financial resources, inadequate housing, community support and combined stressors of home and work obligations. The effects of maternal depression on the child may include cognitive, emotional and social difficulties, challenges in self-regulation, sleep disorders, insecure attachment and behavioral disorders (Landy, 2002). Early diagnosis and treatment is therefore crucial in minimizing long term implications for the young child. Thus, the more in tune the early childhood practitioners are with the signs and symptoms of maternal depression, the stronger is the likelihood that risks may be minimized.

Championing families to commence and continue with *breastfeeding* is an additional way that early childhood environments can promote overall health and wellness during the postnatal period, and through the formative years of childhood. Breastfeeding is recommended by the World Health Organization up to two years and beyond and it is linked to a plethora of affirmative outcomes for the child such as decreased incidence of Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, types 1 and 2 diabetes, obesity, childhood lymphomas and leukemia (Mannel, Martens & Walker, 2013). Benefits for the mother include reduced incidences of premenopausal cancers of the breast and ovaries, osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease (Mannel, Martens & Walker, 2013). While there are conditions when a woman is unable to breastfeed and where practitioners must maintain respect and sensitivity, there is also an obligation to support and advocate breastfeeding in families that are of child bearing age.

In reflection of the statement that "a caregiver who supports breastfeeding can make the difference between sustaining breastfeeding and stopping early" (Mannel, Martens & Walker 2013, p. 128), it is undoubtedly valuable when early childhood professionals are well versed in both the associated science and the relational and environmental strategies, to encourage this incredibly advantageous practice.

### Strategies to Promote Healthy Pre & Postnatal Development

In summary, tangible strategies to foster pre- and postnatal development in early years setting include:

- Embed pre and postnatal care components into the center's philosophy and/or mission statement.
- Ensure that the interview process for new hires includes questions relating to the early childhood practitioners role in promoting these critical periods of development.
- Provide professional development training opportunities for staff to ensure that they are comfortably versed in related topics such as brain development, teratogens, NTD, attachment, breastfeeding, post-partum depression and developmental implications that may arise should the pre and/or postnatal periods of development are compromised in any way.
- Collaborate and partner with community agencies and resources (such as local health units, Motherisk, La Leche League) that provide educational opportunities and services to families who are of childbearing year age.
- Educate early childhood practitioners to be aware of early warning signs of post-partum depression, implications of teratogens on the developing child, and insecure attachment relationships of the child/parent dyad.

- Have current and readily available links and information packages to services specialized in pre and postnatal care. Encourage open and honest dialogue focusing on pre and postnatal development with colleagues to ensure that concerns, fears, challenges and successes can be shared.
- Advocate for pre and postnatal content to be embedded into the content of early childhood post-secondary programs to safeguard that these critical periods of development are explored by ECE students, in both academic and field training .

### Giving Merit to the Foundational Periods of Development

Early childhood practitioners are typically experts in infant, toddler, preschool and school-age child development, and most are able to very competently articulate child developmental skills and transfer them into documentation and curriculum experiences to further scaffold growth of the child. Too often however, the child's pre and postnatal periods of development are overlooked, forgotten or not given the credit for the child's current state of development. By neglecting these foundational phases of growth we, as early childhood professionals, may forego opportunities to transfer knowledge and resources that could potentially lead to more favorable outcomes for the child. Early intervention is a central component of early childhood practice, and when we capture the early beginnings of life, we undeniably lay a solid foundation for future health and wellness of children and their families.

**Tina Bonnett**, M.ECED., R.E.C.E., IMH Cert.  
Early Childhood Education & Early Childhood  
Leadership Faculty School of Human Services Fanshawe  
College 1001 Fanshawe College Blvd., P.O. Box 7005,  
London, Ontario, D3005 N5Y 5R6 519-452-4430 Ext:  
2912 tbonnett@fanshawec.ca

## References

Benoit, D. (2002). What is Attachment? Newsletter of the Infant Mental Health Promotion Project. IMPrint. 5-7.

Green, R., Ehrhardt, J., Ruttenber, M., Olney, R. (2011). Use of Family History Information for Neural Tube Defect Prevention: Integration into State-based Recurrence Prevention Programs. *American Journal of Health Education*, 42(5), 296-308.

Kail, R., Barnfield, A. (2013). Child Development: An Early Years Perspective. Custom Edition. Fanshawe College. Pearson. Ontario, Canada.

Landy, S. (2000). The Impact of Maternal Depression on Child Development. Newsletter of the Infant Mental Health Promotion Project. IMPrint. 104-107.

Mannel, R., Martens, P., Walker, P. (2013). Core Curriculum for Lactation Consultant Practice. Third Edition. Jones & Bartlett Learning. Burlington, MA. *The Science of Babies*. United States: National Geographic, 2013. DVD, 120 min.

Ray, J., Wyatt, P., Thompson, M., Vermuelen, M., Meier, C., Wond, P., Farrell, S. Cole, D. (2007). Vitamin B12 and the Risk of Neural Tubal Defects in a Folic-Acid- Fortified Population. *Epidemiology*. DOI:10.109 7/01ede.0000257063.77411e9. Source: PubMed.



The Canadian Child Care Federation publishes IDEAS twice a year in partnership with George Brown College's School of Early Childhood and the Child Development Institute. For submission to IDEAS please contact Connie Winder. Phone (416) 415-5000 extension 3018, fax (416) 415-2565, email cwinder@georgebrown.ca

## IDEAS Editorial Board

Connie Winder, George Brown College, Managing Editor  
Jan Blaxall, Dominion Learning Institute of Canada  
Patricia Chorney Rubin, George Brown College  
Aurelia DiSanto, Ryerson University  
Sue Hunter, Hunter Consultants  
Theo Lax, Child Development Institute  
Donna MacCormac, ECE Consultant & Freelance Writer

Become a CCCF  
Member and Get

# Interaction



**Yes!** I want to become a member of the Canadian Child Care Federation and receive *Interaction* magazine.

Individual: \$65  
Organization: \$90  
Student: \$35



Canadian  
Child Care  
Federation  
Fédération  
canadienne des  
éducatrices et  
éducateurs  
de la garderie  
et de l'école

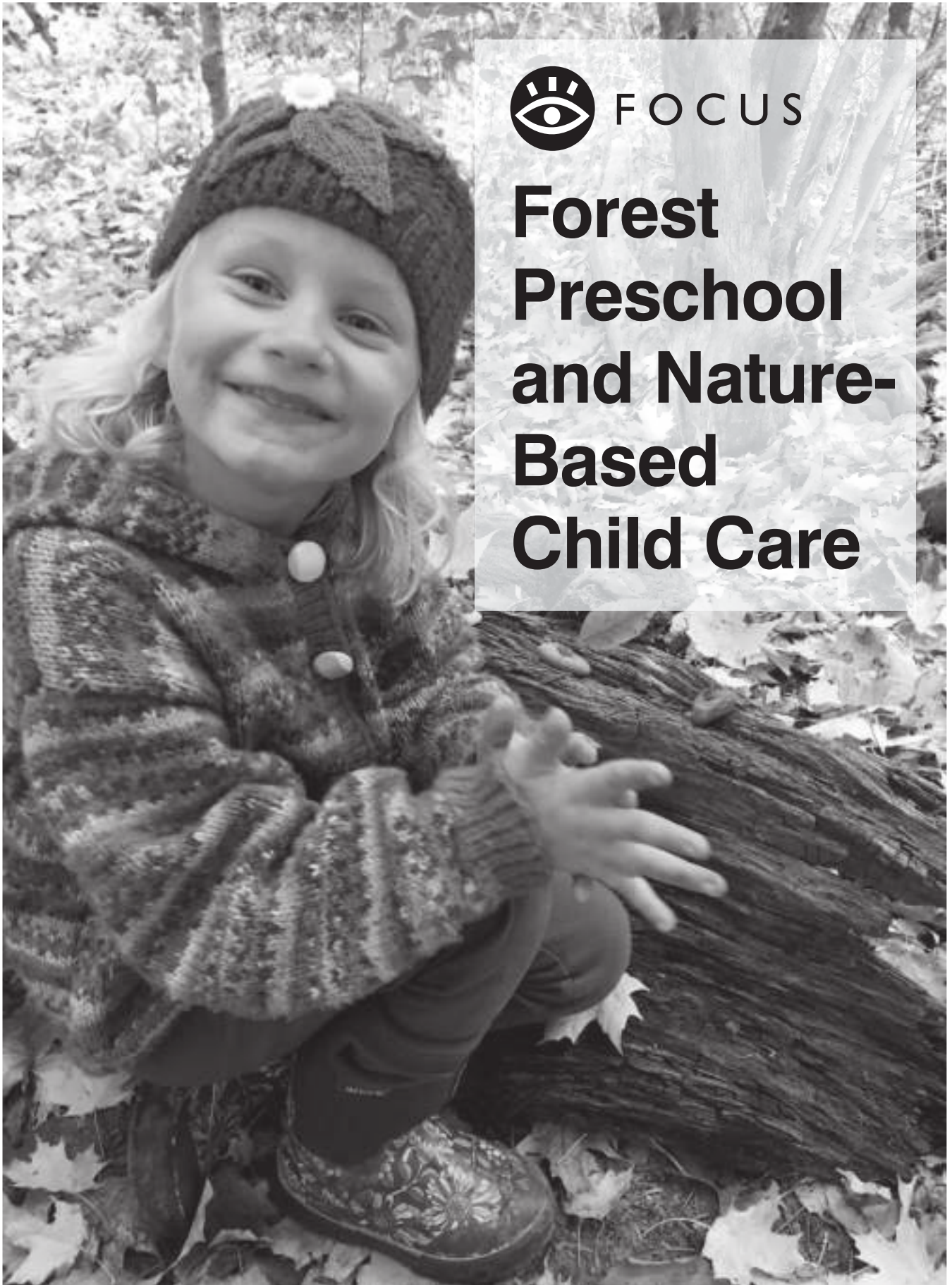
[www.cccf-fcsge.ca/membership/](http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/membership/)





FOCUS

# **Forest Preschool and Nature- Based Child Care**





## FOREST PRESCHOOL AND NATURE BASED CHILD CARE

# There are no expectations when you are in the woods

## Reflections of Forest School Training

by Denise Skuce

Home Child Care

*All in all the Forest School Practitioners course has helped me to become bigger and better than I hoped to be; it has opened doors that I always wanted to open but did not have the direction nor the knowledge on how to do it. The school has helped me to develop my child care home into a place I would want to be as a child. Hopefully, I can show parents a different way their children can learn and I can be a positive and enlightening influence in a child's life and they will remember their time under my care as part of the best time of their childhood. Denise Skuce*

### Why Take the Forest School Practitioners course?

I decided to take the Forest School Practitioners course for many reasons, professionally and personally. One of them being that I saw colleagues move on to bigger and better things... writing books opening centres, becoming instructors. I wanted to do something different that touched my heart. When I heard about Forest School and the idea of spending most of my time outside got me very excited. I love spending time outdoors but have felt like I was confined. I also wanted to do something different, something that was out of the ordinary. Forest School sparked my interest, it wasn't something that everyone else was doing



and it was something that I already enjoyed doing, connecting children to nature.

For years I took my daycare children out in nature, at different times of the year in different seasons, walks along the river bank, exploring the grasslands or going to the forestry farm. Taking the children camping for a few days and nights was a highlight of my summers. As my child care home grew and most of the children in my care were younger; it was harder to do those things. Every year we plant and grow a garden and eat the foods that we grow. We start flowers from seeds in the early spring to decorate the yard. We have participated in mud day since the year of its inception. I often have neighbourhood children wanting to come and play. Nothing like a hot day in summer with mud puddles to play in. I try to get children to experience nature just in the backyard, from rolling down the hill that we created to digging up worms, making bird feeders to watching the birds, and letting them climb trees, to searching for ladybugs. I still felt I wasn't giving them enough opportunities to play unrestricted in nature. Forest school philosophy hopefully, will help with that.

I find it very important for children to be in a natural environment, for at least a portion of their day. I see children that are under extreme amounts of stress and anxiety which





## **The concept of bringing the outdoors in always baffled me – Why don't we just take the kids outdoors?**

leads to behavioural problems; they must be in school sitting at a desk or they must take part in sports and structured activities. They are very scheduled. As well they also must compete with their peers to keep up with all the technology of the day. By having time in nature they can relax and enjoy themselves with no pressure to accomplish these other things. Children, especially toddlers and preschoolers, just need to be free to run and explore their surroundings. It's not so much about children being outside all the time. Being submerged in nature, grasslands, forests, etc., is different from being outside in a backyard or on the playground. You can see children and adults physically relax. When you remove the walls you remove stress. There are no expectations when you are in the woods.

### **Awakening to new approaches**

Some approaches I took from the course is to be more intentional with what we are doing, being sure to observe and reflect on what the children are experiencing. Having more discussions about what is happening around them. Listening to the wind in the trees, the birds singing. Watching the children discover new things and the curiosity it brings. Like why does the tree bark look that way? or why has the tree fallen down? What kind of plants are those? Learning alongside the children is probably the greatest feeling. The children become more engaged when they know that you are learning something the same time they are. Also important is learning about risk management and paying attention to what obstacles are around and what to do to minimize the risk. Discovering what the dangers are and what to do about them. Being aware of the risks and hazards at the different seasons, after a storm, or checking daily if things may have come up over night.

### **Shared learning with the children**

Some of the things I enjoyed most was learning how to make my own tools and tying different types of knots, knowing that I will be able to share that knowledge and be able to see the children make their own tools and tying the knots themselves.



The biggest challenge I have right now is getting to the forest. With each child's schedule and with having very young children in the home, it is sometimes hard to get there (we have to drive or take city transit). Sometimes I will take half of the children one day and the other half the next. In the times it is impossible to go to the forest or grasslands we go for a walk in the neighbourhood. In the winter, we look at tracks in the snow, jump into snow banks and look at ice crystals. In summer, we are often out walking through the neighbourhood looking at the different flowers and trees that the neighbours have, checking out the bugs on the sidewalk, looking at the clouds, and smelling the fresh air.

### **Nature: leading children to self-guided learning**

Children are very competent to guide their own learning. The first time a small child holds a lady bug in their hand, and feeling it crawling, you know that they are learning, you can see it in their face; in their eyes. Their sense of wonder and curiosity gets them on the path of now going to find the ladybug. Where do they live? What do they eat? This develops into looking for other small creatures to learn about. It encourages them to see beyond themselves and look around to discover other things in nature. Animals, plants. This cannot be done in a house, watching a screen.





The part that inspires me the most about Forest and Nature School is seeing children able to play in an unstructured environment where they are free to be themselves without any pressures of “the things that must be done”. To just be kids, like the way we and previous generations used to be when we were young. To strive to be more independent, and learn about nature instead of watching it on television.

### **Since taking the course I personally have spent more time outside**

I started doing things that I loved to do as a child and made sure that I included that with the children in my child care home.

The training gave me the tools and the research to back up and sell the idea to prospective clients; it has opened many doors. It also allowed me to connect with other people that have the same interests and goals: to have children spend more time outdoors in nature.

### **The concept of bringing the outdoors in always baffled me – Why don’t we just take the kids outdoors?**

We are hearing tons of research about how children don’t get enough physical activity and how children are overweight. How

children have lost that connection to nature and exploring it. I see educators struggle with incorporating more of these structured activities during the day. There are plenty of beautiful green spaces and urban forests within our cities—we just have to get the children to them.

The Forest School Practitioners course has helped me to become bigger and better than I hoped to be; it has opened doors that I always wanted to open but didn’t have the direction nor the knowledge on how to do it. The School has helped me to develop my child care home into a place I would want to be as a child. Hopefully, I can show parents a different way their children can learn and I can be a positive and enlightening influence in a child’s life and they will remember their time under my care as part of the best time of their childhood.

For information about the Forest School Practitioner’s course: Forest School Canada, Instructors: Marlene Power, Chris Filler, Mavis Lewis-Webber; [www.forestschoolcanada.ca/home/professional-learning-opportunities/facilitator-biographies](http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/home/professional-learning-opportunities/facilitator-biographies)

**Denise Skuce** has a Family Child Care Group home in Saskatoon and has been licensed as a provider for 20 years. She has her ECE level III and is presently in the Forest School Practitioners Course. She is a board member of the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association and on the CAYC Saskatoon Satellite. She has two grown up daughters and a significant other. “Children are like Flowers, They need dirt to Grow”  
Author unknown





## FOREST PRESCHOOL AND NATURE BASED CHILD CARE

# Deeply Rooted Development

## Planting the seeds of inclusion and nature

by Kathryn Markham-Petro

When you think about playing outside as a younger child, what comes to mind? Are you and your friends all standing on asphalt or concrete with no toys in hand? When you looked around, was everyone playing the same game in the same way? Are you standing still on the playground, shivering and waiting for recess to end?

In all likelihood, being outside as a child does not conjure up any of these images. Most adults fondly remember outdoor play as a time for exploration. You were free to move your body any which way you wanted to. Falling down and getting up were part of that time outside and from those falls you learned what your body could and could not do. By playing with different kinds of snow, you figured out that not all snow packed together with pressure and you learned how thick the ice on puddles needed to be to support your weight. You learned that if you didn't heed your parent's advice and wear those hats, mittens and boots that you really did get cold, wet and uncomfortable. When you played you took risks, pushed your own limits and you learned from your mistakes. Those sounds and images are called joy and those are important aspects of learning and childhood, which sadly are missing today in the lives of many children.

When children are outside, they not only learn these incredibly important life skills, they learn and experience what can be classified into "subjects" like math, science, geography and physical education (Williams & Dixon, 2013). Whether we label it outdoor education, nature school, outdoor time, or forest school, taking children out of their indoor environment produces a multitude of benefits. Every domain of learning can



be promoted in the outdoor environment for every child, often times more effectively than we can facilitate development inside the classroom.

Gardens offer an opportunity for language growth, particularly for English as second language learners. Facilitating discussions between children about the things they are noticing, doing, feeling, and smelling presents children with a chance for real life natural conversations (Cutter-Mackenzie, 2009, p. 130). As Canada welcomes children and families from other countries and the face of our classrooms continues to change and evolve, how can we use the outdoors to support the learning of those who are *different* in our programs? How can we make them feel less different and more a part of our classrooms and programs?

Being outdoors in natural play spaces offers irreplaceable opportunities for children to learn about each other, and about themselves, in a different way. Think about being out in nature and the risks involved in simply trying to get through spaces where there are trees, mud, puddles and if you are lucky, wildlife. Moving through that space provides lessons in math, geography, science, communication, respect and sense of self. Traditional turf and asphalt spaces offer play experiences but



when we provide children with “green” space, this creates a new level of active real time learning.

### **Outdoor spaces and inclusion**

When traditional outdoor spaces have green areas added to them in early learning or school environments, children are more likely to be inclusive of children who have different abilities, races and gender than themselves because of the balance of active and quiet play that appeals to a large variety of children than typical outdoor spaces do (Dyment & Bell, 2008).

Creating spaces for children to interact with those that are not the same as they are becomes particularly important as we become increasingly more diverse.

This tendency to be more accepting of differences extends to indoor play as well. Children who spend more time outside in naturalized spaces are better problem solvers and collaborate more with others. This effect carries over to indoor learning environments (Passey, 2014, p. 34). Children feel more connected to spaces when they are involved in the planning and maintenance of these spaces. This has been shown to foster higher levels of acceptance and exploration (Pivnick, 2001). We want children to participate in owning the space as much as they are cognitively able to do so for that sense of connection to occur and increase.

### **Gardening makes an outdoor learning environment a reality**

Perhaps you have been inspired by a class or school that spends the entire day outside in a seemingly idealic outdoor space but were discouraged by the rules, barriers and restrictions that prohibit that from becoming a reality. Oftentimes we feel constrained by the space we have been allocated or excluded from the space we wish to access. While you might not be able to create an entire classroom outside all year round right away, you can provide valuable learning experiences on a smaller scale.



**Creating spaces for children to interact with those that are not the same as they are becomes particularly important as we become increasingly more diverse.**

Use a large pot for seeds or bulbs in your outdoor space. This affords children the experience of gardening in a meaningful way and contributes to greening an otherwise sterile space. If you are in an area where you are concerned about vandalism or theft, place these pots on top of scooter boards, thereby ensuring they are portable and not too heavy to lift.

Connecting with community gardens opens numerous opportunities for collaboration and networking that are often literally right in our backyards. Community gardens connect





your program not only to physical space that you can use for planting, but also to those community members who can offer their expertise and advice.

Many of us have memories of planting the bean in a cup as part of our exposure to gardening in the classroom. Although these activities are initially enjoyable for the children, once the bean starts to grow they are sent home and rarely do children get the satisfaction of seeing the full cycle of planting. Children understand the abstract concept of change over time more completely when their attention is drawn to the successive transformations, particularly when they chart the growth.

If you are limited to only being able to plant something to remain in your classroom in a cup, you can expand this project into larger bins so that more children can observe the growth. This will facilitate informal yet meaningful small group conversations about what they are observing and detecting. You could even convert your sensory table to a larger grow table. Beans are easy to grow but lettuce seeds grow faster and allow children to try different kinds of greens like kale, spinach, chard, red oak leaves, arugula and romaine. They also grow with low light so ideal for growing inside.

Indoor lettuce gardens allow not only for that direct observation of growth and the conditions necessary for that growth but offer a wonderful opportunity to discuss flavours that are perhaps novel and unique. Lettuce also presents an easy cooking activity that even toddlers can accomplish as it simply involves “ripping” lettuce and allows all children to experience lettuce in a truly sensory manner.

## Funding gardens and space greening projects

- Always start with your families for donations and then look to your neighbours.
- Most areas have horticulture societies or community garden collectives that will happily donate seeds for gardens, expertise and perhaps cash if they have the means.
- Many high schools and community colleges have horticulture programs that have extra seeds, seedlings, potting soil or other things you need to start your project.
- Many college programs have requirements for volunteer hours that the students must log. Offering your program as a means to meet these students volunteer requirements creates a community connection and exposes the children in your class to different people.

Asking for donations from these organizations provides real materials for the class garden to start right away. You can start

**Indoor lettuce gardens allow not only for that direct observation of growth and the conditions necessary for that growth but offer a wonderful opportunity to discuss flavours that are perhaps novel and unique. Lettuce also presents an easy cooking activity that even toddlers can accomplish as it simply involves “ripping” lettuce and allows all children to experience lettuce in a truly sensory manner.**

an indoor garden anytime during the year, and move it outside once the weather allows.

When you hear about children learning outdoors or about nature and gardening you might think it is just another fad in education or something not meant for where you are or for the children in your class. It is time to consider all the research revealing the importance of outside learning experiences, and it is time to rekindle the joy that comes from being outside. Let us put this into practice in every class, for all children of every age so that they too can create these fond memories of the wonders of being outdoors.

**Kathryn Markham-Petro** is a Professor of Early Childhood Education at St. Clair College in Windsor, Ontario. She has worked in the field of early learning for over twenty years in a variety of roles and agencies. She is currently completing her Doctorate in Education through the University of Western Ontario where she is researching social inclusion in outdoor spaces. Her fondest memories of being outside are with her children Hannah, Mack and Eve and as a child on her family farm.

### References

- Cutter-Mackenzie, A. (2009). Multicultural school gardens: Creating engaging garden spaces in learning about language, culture, and environment. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14(1), 122-135.
- Dyment, J. E., & Reid, A. (2005). Breaking new ground? reflections on greening school grounds as sites of ecological, pedagogical, and social transformation. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 10(1), 286-301.
- Passey, R. (2014). School gardens: Teaching and learning outside the front door. *Education*, 42(1), 3-13.
- Williams, D. R., & Dixon, S. P. (2013). Impact of garden-based learning on academic outcomes in schools: Synthesis of research between 1990 and 2010. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(2), 211-235.



## FOREST PRESCHOOL AND NATURE BASED CHILD CARE

# It's Okay to Let Kids Play

## Forest and Nature School, Risky Play, and Early Learning

by **Marlene Power**

Executive Director, Child and Nature Alliance of Canada,  
Founder, Forest School Canada

### Overview

Canadian children currently have limited opportunities to engage in risky play in nature in their early learning experiences, as well as at home. Despite this, emerging research suggests that a decrease in these opportunities is greatly impacting children's development and overall health. Using Ellen Sandseter's (2007) risky play categories as a starting place to define risky play, I will explore the evidence supporting an increase in children's opportunities for risky play in nature, and implications for practice in Early Childhood Education,

### Introduction

Can you imagine a world where children spend all their days inside of four walls, and are no longer allowed to climb trees, jump in puddles, run through the forest, rummage through nearby ravines, walk on ice, slide down hills, or disappear behind a rose bush? Although this would have sounded hard to believe only two decades ago, it is increasingly becoming the reality of children in Canada today. As stated in a 2014 report by the Canadian Parks Council, "Separation from nature... is an unintended consequence of our modern world." (Parks Canada, 2014, p.3). In addition to this separation, Marano (2004) reported that, increasingly, parents are going to absurd lengths to take all risk, both metaphoric and literal 'bumps in



the road', out of their children's lives. We're seeing these same trends in early learning centres and on school grounds with the disappearance of trees, rocks, and other natural material, as well as the ban on outdoor recess and lunch with the first drop of rain on the roof, or first flake of snow landing on the ground. Risky play in nature has now become a rarity and there are detrimental effects to the culture, health and development of the child (Brussoni, 2012).

### What is risky play?

Ellen Sandseter has defined risky play for us in a way that is accessible and easy to understand. I have come to believe that defining risky play in this way will allow us to work towards a commonly understood vision, despite the fact that this issue is controversial in today's culture of risk-aversion and injury prevention. According to Sandseter (2007) there are six categories of risky play: 1) Play with great heights; 2) Play with high speed; 3) Play with harmful tools; 4) Play near dangerous elements; 5) Rough-and-tumble play; and 6) Play where the children can 'disappear'/get lost (Sandseter, 2007, p. 237). In my own experience working with children in a Forest School setting, there is no greater place to support risky play, as defined above, than in the natural world. Trees, rocks, bark, stumps, logs, planks, fire pits, shrubs, water, and mud provide the canvas for children to do what they do best, to explore their bodies and the world through play. It is important to note, by this definition, *all play in nature is considered risky play*.



Forest School Canada has reported (2014), in a recent publication that children in a Forest and Nature School setting are encouraged to learn through play, and an emergent curriculum in the same natural place over an extended period of time. This means that children are both supported, and given permission, to follow their own instincts, desires and curiosities. The role of the educator becomes that of a facilitator, whose primary tasks is to support children through inquiry, asking the right questions rather than dictating outcomes or leading an activity. This kind of educational setting, and this starting point of play, provides further opportunities to engage in risky play over an extended period of time, in an educational setting. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that many Canadian children are currently being limited in their play in both their home and academic settings (Brussoni et al., 2015).

### Why is this important?

Despite the level of interest and support in Canada currently for Forest and Nature School, misinformed fears of liability and fears of injury from parents, administrators, educators and the general public prevail. After repeatedly hearing similar fears and experiencing similar barriers, a group of national not for profit stakeholders launched a collaborative research project exploring the risks and benefits of children engaging in risky play. This resulted in two systematic reviews, as well as a “Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play” published by Participaction in 2015 (Tremblay et al., 2015). This position statement was the first evidenced-based, Canadian document to look at both the risks and benefits to children spending more time in free play in the outdoors. As a result, there was a public call for all Canadians to “loosen the reins on childhood”, with recommendations being made across sectors on how they can support children in doing so (Tremblay et al., 2015).

There is considerable evidence that that risky outdoor play is not only good for children’s health but also encourages creativity, social skills and resilience (Brussoni et al., 2015). The evidence also indicates that the overall positive health effects of increased risky outdoor play

provide greater benefit than the health effects associated with avoiding outdoor risky play (Brussoni et al., 2015). In other words, it is far more dangerous to a child’s health to stay indoors, where they will be less physically active and will be exposed to other risks, rather than outdoors where they can climb trees, build forts, jump puddles, build ropes swings, etc. Although there are risks to children when being active in the outdoors, the risks are mostly minor and attribute to children’s resiliency and overall capacity to solve problems throughout the lifespan. This evidence suggests overall positive effects of risky outdoor play on a variety of health indicators and behaviours. Specifically, when children had opportunities to engage in many elements of risky play, they were more physically active and exhibited lower levels of sedentary behavior. Alternatively, when children were supervised in their play, they had lower levels of physical activity. In addition to this, risky play supported social health, social competence, play time, social interactions, creativity and resilience, and did not increase aggression, as many people would think. Lastly, in exploring play at height, there was no relationship found to fracture frequency and severity, which is one of the greatest fears in allowing children to climb trees and other heights on school grounds (Brussoni et al., 2015).

Additionally, Kuo et al. (2001) have found that contact with nature is systematically related to lessened attention deficit symptoms. Activities nominated as helpful in reducing attention deficit symptoms were likely to take place in green outdoor settings. Conversely, activities nominated by parents as exacerbating symptoms were disproportionately likely to take place in non-green outdoor settings.







## What can be done?

Early Childhood Educators have a unique role in supporting risky play in nature, as well as the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play (Tremblay et al. 2015), because of the emphasis on play-based learning already evident in this field. Also, we are often with our children for longer periods of time, with care extending later in the day than a typical school day. Therefore, here are some recommendations on how to implement this into practice:

1. Think twice before saying no to children climbing trees, rocks or stumps on the playground. How can you support this kind of play instead?
2. Step aside and let children play. Guide play-based learning with purpose and intent, rather than dictating play experiences.
3. Learn more about Forest and Nature School, seek professional learning on risk, benefit assessments to learn more about balancing duty of care with supporting children's right to risky play in education.
4. Build a culture of play that includes the outdoors, in your setting and include this into parent orientations so at the outset parents are on board with their children getting dirty and playing outside in ALL weather.
5. Explore loose parts and naturalizing your playgrounds, especially when in urban centres. The Forest and Nature School ethos can be implemented in all settings, including urban playgrounds!
6. Support staff in your early learning centre with opportunities for professional learning that involves supporting children's play outdoors.
7. Seek to build these opportunities into your practice every day, on a regular and repeated basis. This will support a culture of outdoor learning, and will assist in relationship building with the land and students.
8. Go beyond the playground, often there are little forests and parks nearby that are beautiful places to offer diverse play experiences.



### References:

Brussoni M, Gibbons R, Gray C, Ishikawa T, Sandseter EB, Bienenstock A, Chabot G, Fuselli P, Herrington S, Janssen I, Pickett W, Power M, Stanger N, Sampson M, Tremblay MS. (2015). What is the Relationship between Risky Outdoor Play and Health in Children. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 12 (6): 6423-6454

Brussoni M., Olsen L. L., Pike I., Sleet D. (2012). *Risky play and children's safety: Balancing priorities for optimal child development*. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*.; 9:3134-3138. Doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134

Forest School Canada (2014). *Forest and Nature School in Canada: A Head, Heart, Hands Approach to Outdoor Learning*. Retrieved from: [http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/wp-content/themes/wlf/images/FSC-Guide\\_web.pdf](http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/wp-content/themes/wlf/images/FSC-Guide_web.pdf)

Jambor T. (1998). *Challenge and Risk-Taking in Play*. In: Fromberg D.P., Bergen D., editors. *Play from Birth to Twelve and Beyond: Contexts, Perspectives, and Meanings*. Routledge; New York, NY, USA.

Parks Canada. (2014) *Connecting Canadians with Nature — An Investment in the Well-Being of our Citizens*. Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada

Sandseter E.B.H., Kennair L.E.O. (2011). *Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences*. *Evol. Psychol.*; 9:257-284

Sandseter E.B.H. (2007). *Categorising risky play—How can we identify risk-taking in children's play?* *Eur. Early Child Educ. Res. J.* 15:237-252. doi: 10.1080/13502930701321733

Sandseter E.B.H. (2015). *Preschool teachers' perceptions of children's rough-and tumble play (R&T) in indoor and outdoor environments*. *Eur. Early Child Development and Care*. 185(11-12): 1995-2009

Taylor, A. F., Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (2001). *Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings*. *Environment & Behavior*, 33(1), 54-77

Tremblay, M. S., Gray, C., Babcock, S., et al (2015). *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 12(6), 6475-6505

Tremblay MS, Gray C, Babcock S, Barnes J, Bradstreet CC, Carr D, Chabot G, Choquette L, Chorney D, Collyer C, Herrington S, Janson K, Janssen I, Larouche R, Pickett W, Power M, Sandseter EB, Simon B, Brussoni M. (2015). *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. Jun 8;12(6):6475-6505

Ungar M. (2007). *Too Safe for Their Own Good*. McClelland & Stewart; Toronto, ON, Canada

Valentine G., & McKendrick J. (1997). *Children's outdoor play: Exploring parental concerns about children's safety and the changing nature of childhood*. *Geoforum*. 28:219-235. doi: 10.1016/S0016-7185(97)00010-9.

Veitch J., Bagley S., Ball K., Salmon J. (2006). *Where do children usually play? A qualitative study of parents' perceptions of influences on children's active free-play*. *Health Place*.; 12:383-393



## FOREST PRESCHOOL AND NATURE BASED CHILD CARE

# Nature is Calling – Please Act

by Dr. Diane Kashin, RECE

This article serves as a call to action. It is an invitation to actively participate in a growing social movement to benefit young children. Social movements are characterized by people who get together to advance shared ideas, with the intention to bring about change for the betterment of society. We must change from the indoor culture of childhood to an outdoor culture. We are in a serious, real crisis. Childhood, as it has been known for hundreds of years is changing with children spending more time indoors and less time outdoors. This is not the childhood of my past. My fondest memories are of those times spent playing outdoors in unstructured activities and without supervision. Today's children are being kept indoors for many reasons. The perception may be that the outdoors is not safe or educators may not know what to do with children when they are outside.

Early childhood educators may know more about curriculum programming for indoors rather than for outdoors. Outside, they may feel more secure supervising children in playgrounds. There is also a tendency to bring “the outdoors in” by creating naturalistic indoor learning environments full of loose parts such as rocks and pinecones. Naturalizing indoor environments should not diminish the experiences we offer children in the outdoors. Perhaps we should think about leaving the outdoors where it is and bringing the children outside to the loose parts as they are found in nature. If you haven't already started to think about the importance of nature and outdoor play experiences for children, perhaps it is time that you did? An indoor childhood threatens the health, fitness and well-being of children. This call to action is asking you to go outside with children more often. Children's lives are shaped by the places they inhabit. Help children make a stronger connection to the natural world.

### There are many ways that you can bring nature back to children

Look inside the playground. Can you naturalize the space? Bringing natural loose parts into your playground will increase



children's opportunities for learning in and with nature. You can also look beyond the fence. Is there a forest, a stream, a meadow, a ravine or hillside where children can experience and learn about the natural world? Children love spending time in nature. Zoe, the five year old in the photos would rather be in nature than anywhere else. How different is she than all children from infants to school aged children? The only difference is that she has had the opportunities. All children want to be outside!

If you go outside with children you will be joining an already growing movement in early childhood education. According to David Sobel who wrote the book *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning* (2016), “the movement is nature-based” (p. 1). Nature preschools in North America go back to the 1970's as they began as an offshoot of the original Earth Day. Forest kindergartens surfaced in the 1960s in Scandinavia and now there are thousands throughout the world (Sobel, 2016).

Starting nature preschools or forest kindergartens may not be in the sights for most early childhood educators in Canada. They take a financial investment and a commitment to site and risk management. But embedding nature into your programs and curriculum takes mostly a commitment of time. Take the time to invite children to be in nature.

Give them opportunities to explore, climb, discover and to just be in nature. These types of experiences contribute to children's



healthy development. The benefits far outweigh the risks. In fact, there are more detrimental consequences to children remaining indoors.

The recently published *Position Statement on Outdoor Play* (2015), Susan Herrington, MLA, University of British Columbia; Dr. William Pickett, Queen's University, clearly outlines the importance of active, outdoor play (<http://www.participation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Position-Statement-on-Active-Outdoor-Play-EN-FINAL.pdf>). Outdoors, children who engage in active and even risky play will not only receive the health benefits of such a lifestyle, they will become closer to the world outside increasing the potential for environmental stewardship. Children are unable to take care of a world that they do not know. They need to learn to love the earth.

Children don't always have the outdoor opportunities that they should as their time outside and even their time to play, may be limited by the adults in their lives. When I was a practicing early childhood educator, I would take children outdoors for the minimum time required and they would play in a fenced playground even though just beyond the fence was a large green space with trees, grass, rocks, sticks, mud, hills and earth. I never ventured beyond the playground. I thought the children needed the structures in the playground in order to play. That was the scope of my understanding of what constituted outdoor play and learning. Now, I know that there is a world to discover and to learn from as long as there is a tree, a patch of earth or a puddle. In this natural world, true and authentic learning occurs. In childhoods of the past, where outdoor play was plentiful, children learned to handle their own quarrels, negotiate turns, participate in risky

**Embedding nature into  
your programs and  
curriculum takes mostly  
a commitment of time.  
Take the time to invite  
children to be in nature.**

play, problem solve, create with natural materials and build relationships with the flora and fauna and other inhabitants of the land. We must keep this tradition alive.

The forests, paths, flowers and creatures that inhabit nature are filled with wonders to explore. What do they see when they lie on the grass and look up at the sky?

What can they find when they look under

the rock? As they walk along the forest path, what is there to discover and play with? What can they learn as they balance themselves on a log? Curriculum can and should emerge outdoors. What children naturally do outdoors such as small world constructions, den building, collecting berries, finding their way through untracked woods, following animal tracks (Sobel, 2016) support development across all domains. Math, science, art, language, literacy, dramatic and construction play all can happen outdoors!

*A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood ~ Rachel Carson*

The forest and nature school movement is in its infancy in Canada but in other places in the world it has a longer history. Movements are expansive in scope and involve coordinated and preventative action by many. There is no "quick fix" or "magic bullet" for resolving the play, fitness, and health crises for children. The approaches must be multiple (Frost, 2009).



Know that this increased emphasis on outdoor play is not just a trend, it is a growing movement and you have the chance to be on the ground floor! The ground is covered with dirt, grass, sand and mud.

**Diane Kashin** Ed.D, RECE. Diane earned her Bachelor of Honours from York University and an Early Childhood Education diploma from Seneca College. Diane worked in child care for a number of years before beginning graduate studies at the OISE/U of T and teaching early childhood

As a child care provider and early childhood educator, you are in an ideal position to make a difference. Learn more about forest and nature schools from Forest School Canada.  
<http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/>.

You can also participate in a research study funded by the Lawson Foundation  
<http://bit.ly/1VjKD2> or by contacting me at [diane.kashin@ryerson.ca](mailto:diane.kashin@ryerson.ca).





education at both the degree and the diploma level. Diane earned a Masters and Doctorate of Education and her doctoral thesis: *Reaching the Top of the Mountain: The Impact of Emergent Curriculum on the Practice and Self-Image of Early Childhood Educators* was published in 2009. Diane has written two textbooks with Pearson, Canada co-authored with Beverlie Dietze; *Playing and Learning in Early Childhood Education* (2012) and *Empowering Pedagogy* (2016). Diane is now teaching part time at Ryerson University. Diane and Beverlie are working together with Okanagan, Lethbridge and Northern Colleges along with the Canadian Child Care Federation on a research project funded by the Lawson Foundation to create specialized outdoor play training to empower children's experiences. Diane also authors a blog to support professional learning in early childhood education: <http://tecribresearch.wordpress.com> and is the Chair of the York Region Nature Collaborative.

#### References:

Forest School Canada. <http://www.forestschoollcanada.ca/>.

Frost, Joe L. (2009). *A History of Children's Play and Play Environments: Toward a Contemporary Child Saving Movement*. Routledge: New York & London.

Sobel, David (2008). *Childhood and Nature. Design principles for educators*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Sobel, David (2016). *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

## ACROSS CANADA AND BEYOND

### NATIONAL

The new federal families minister, Jean-Yves Duclos says he and his provincial counterparts appear to be on the fast-track towards a long-discussed national child care program. The federal and provincial governments should be able to quickly come to an agreement on a framework for a national early learning and child care program because they aren't starting from scratch. Minister Duclos cited past agreements on the principles of a child-care system and work in the intervening years by provinces to improve services. Duclos said the government wants to improve the quality of existing child care spaces, make those spaces more affordable for families and create new spaces for families that find it hard to access quality child care. Duclos said the funding needs for child care are immense, but resources are limited on all fronts, including for the federal government.

**Spanking may be a thing of the past in Canada.** The Liberal Government has announced that it intends to enforce all of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One of the 96 recommendations is to remove Section 43 of the Canadian *Criminal Code*. This controversial section allows teachers and parents to use reasonable force under the circumstances to discipline children. This so-called 'Spanking Law' was reviewed by the Supreme Court in 2004 – and upheld. More

than 40 countries worldwide have banned the physical punishment of children, including Sweden and New Zealand. It's a divisive topic and there's still a ways to go. In order to remove the Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* a bill will need to be presented and passed in Parliament

### ALBERTA

In Alberta, a group of children are embracing the chilly season with the help of a \$110,000 grant aimed at getting kids to play outside. The Glenora Child Care Society received funds from the Lawson Foundation, a group focused on the wellbeing of children, as part of its outdoor play strategy. The society, which cares for 75 kids each day, plans to spend the money on creating a more winter-friendly playground, taking the kids on outdoor winter field trips and hiring outdoor play coordinators to enhance play time in the cold. "Children's play is in decline," said Lawson Foundation President Marcel Lauzière. "Kids actually need unstructured outdoor play – play that includes taking risks – because we know that this is important for their healthy development."

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia, parents of pre-school aged children are well familiar with long waitlists and high fees but there is actually a greater need for after-school care: 10,000 spots are needed compared to the 7,500 shortfall for infant and toddler child care spaces, according to the city's calculations. Several factors make operating after-school care a challenge. It's harder to cover costs than other types of child care and it's difficult to find staff willing to work split shifts with less than full-time hours. Finding space is another challenge. The most convenient location is within the school itself, but schools need to have a multipurpose room available, like an unused classroom.

### MANITOBA

Based on the recommendations of the recently completed Child Care Commission report, Premier Greg Selinger announced a long-term strategy that will help to create a universally accessible child-care system that will lower fees for parents, add 12,000 more spaces and increase training and better wages for educators. The 12,000 new spaces come from the total amount of children on Manitoba's centralized waiting list, meaning that all children that require care will have a space. The strategy will also make child care more affordable for families by implementing a subsidy and a sliding scale on child-care fees and phasing out all fees paid by fully subsidized families.

The province will also implement the report's workforce support recommendations such as: ensuring that child-care centres continue

to hire and retain the best workers by phasing in a provincial wage scale; working with post-secondary institutions to double training opportunities for child-care workers through full-time college programs, workplace training and expanded dual-credit programs in high schools; investing in training supports for low-income Indigenous and newcomer Manitobans; explore a key proposal by the commission that school divisions be responsible for school-age child care.

Pat Wege, with Manitoba's Child Care Association, says she's been lobbying for this for 40 years and is happy there's finally a plan in place to tackle long wait list.

### ONTARIO

For a second straight year, the province of Ontario is increasing wages for early childhood educators and other child care professionals in licensed child care settings. Ontario is providing a \$1 per hour wage increase for eligible child care workers who qualify in the licensed child care sector, bringing the total wage increase up to \$2 per hour, plus benefits. The province is also providing an additional \$10 per day increase to home child care providers who qualify, bringing the total increase up to \$20 per day. Both increases are effective January 2016. The wage enhancement aims to help recruit and retain the best possible early childhood educators and child care professionals. It also closes the wage gap between registered early childhood educators working in kindergarten programs and child care professionals in licensed child care settings.

### QUEBEC

Quebec child cares are closing their doors as a pressure tactic to counter looming budget cuts of at least \$120 million. The Association Québécoise des Centres de la Petite Enfance (AQCPPE), the association representing non-profit, publicly funded child care, plans to launch a campaign to counter the provincial government's austerity measures. Daycare operators say budget cuts affect education and services provided to young children in Quebec's public system. These cuts have led to turning away young children who need extra care or supervision and special needs. The AQCPPE says that while strike action is underway for the new year, it is still willing to talk with the government. Quebec still plans on moving forward with cuts but the ministry of families has said that it is open to discussions.

### SASKATCHEWAN

In December, Regina residents welcomed the first group of government-sponsored Syrian refugees to the city. Refugee agencies are scrambling to ensure they have enough daycare spaces. Daycare spots are used for a variety of reasons, including freeing up parents so they can improve their English. The Regina Open



Door Society has 63 daycare spots and serves many more than that as some youngsters are part-time mornings or afternoons. So far, Regina has received 353 Syrian refugees, including 130 children under the age of five, and more are on the way. The Open Door Society says that having refugee children in daycare, along with other children, is important. "There's language modelling from the Canadian kids and a really great intercultural experience as well."

## CALENDAR

### APRIL

6-9

#### Vancouver, BC

Research on Adolescents and Adults: If Not Now, When? The 7th National Biennial Conference on Adolescents and Adults with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). For more information, please visit the website at <http://interprofessional.ubc.ca/AdultsWithFASD2016>

### MAY

5

#### Richmond, BC

#### ECEBC'S 2ND ANNUAL LEADERSHIP PRECONFERENCE

A Leadership Journey: It's in you. Visit ECEBC's event calendar for more details: <http://www.ecebc.ca/>

5-7

#### Richmond, BC

ECEBC's 45th Annual Conference (2016): The Ripple Effect: Continuing the Journey Through Our Ethical Practices. To register: [www.ecebc.ca/events/](http://www.ecebc.ca/events/)

26-28

#### Winnipeg, MB

Be Inspired! Be Incredible! The Manitoba Child Care Association presents its 39th annual Early Learning and Child Care Conference. Conference Registration: <http://mccahouse.org/conferences/register-online/>

27-28

#### Regina, SK

#### SECA Proudly Presents May Workshops

The Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association is pleased to announce the upcoming workshops to be held in Regina, Saskatchewan. We are thrilled to be hosting these renowned presenters who have not been to our province for a number of years but always draw a crowd with their insightful, upbeat and highly motivational and practical tools and strategies. Mark your calendars and plan to attend. Conference Registration: <http://seca-sk.ca>

### JUNE

10-11

#### Dartmouth NS

#### "Being a Professional" Spring Conference

The NSCCA partners with the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia (CCECENS) and centre provincial de ressources préscolaires (CPRPS) in their planning and delivery of the Spring Conference. The conference aims to enhance practice, professionalism, and quality of care for Nova Scotia's children and families through high quality, informative and practical workshops. Information: <http://nschildcareassociation.org/june2016conferenceandtradeshow/>

### SEPTEMBER

16-17

#### Ottawa, ON

Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) and Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) are having their annual provincial conference. [www.aeceo.ca](http://www.aeceo.ca)

### NOVEMBER 2017

28-30

#### Victoria, BC

"From the Outside Looking In..." British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society's 2017 Indigenous Disability and Wellness Gathering. More info at <http://bcands2017gathering.com/>

## RESOURCES

### PlayDays Canada – Event Hosting Resource Guide

*International Play Association Canada's* resource provides a guide for thinking about and providing a Canada Plays event that will support the emergence of play in children and all of the benefits that accrue from play. Toward that end, the guide outlines the following key topics:

- play and the importance of play in children's lives
- core concepts and components of a PlayDays Canada event
- considerations for planning a PlayDays Canada event
- eight great places for play

**PlayDays Canada** is about the hosting of a special event that provides unique and creative play opportunities for children. This type of child and family friendly event takes place in many communities, in all seasons, both indoors and out.

In Canada, Play Days occur in early childhood settings, during summer playground programs, in schools or as part of large community based celebrations such as Family Day or Canada Day.

For three years, beginning in 2002, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and International Play Association Canada (IPA Canada) teamed up with a sponsor to host a nationwide PlayDay initiative. That partnership supported a significant number of events in both large and small communities across the country.

Download the Resource Guide from the International Play Association Canada's website: <http://www.ipacanada.org/playdayseng.pdf>

## RESEARCH UPDATE

### Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission Final Report

The Province of Manitoba is taking the next steps in creating a universally accessible child-care system for Manitoba families that will include lower fees, 12,000 more spaces, increased training and better wages for early childhood educators. The report is a great model for other provinces and a national system for child care in Canada. Read the full Commission Report: [www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/childcare\\_news/pubs/final\\_report.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/childcare_news/pubs/final_report.pdf)

### Towards a Healthier Canada - 2015 Progress Report on Advancing the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Framework on Healthy Weights

Ministers of Health, Healthy Living, Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation across the country have endorsed and released the *2015 e-Report on Healthy Weights*. The e-Report highlights actions underway to advance the 2010 *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal/Provincial/Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights*; and provides an update of the most recently available data/information on indicators of healthy weights. Read the e-Report on the Pan Canadian Public Health Network: [www.towardsahealthiercanada.ca](http://www.towardsahealthiercanada.ca)