

Interaction

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1, SPRING 2009

Connecting Children to Nature

Our Role in
Nurturing
Respect for the
Environment
– Part I

What's Wrong with Colouring Books?
Walk Through a Forest Preschool



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While a worldwide movement to re-connect children to nature takes place at world forums, symposiums, conferences and governments, the people who are caring for children in early learning and child care have a unique opportunity to achieve this. (see page 27)

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The photo on the front cover was taken by Sarah McCormack, Ottawa, Ontario.

Behind the Scenes

A child's experience in the natural world can be as small as listening to the sound of a bird, touching the bark of a tree or admiring a flower's struggle to grow through the cracks in a concrete sidewalk. We need only to provide that opportunity for children, and perhaps point their attention to it. And then we must get out of the way. This is truly where we let nature take its course.

Gardening with children is probably the single most powerful thing you can do to connect children to nature. It also helps the environment and moves all of us to respect and protect it.

I have seen this first hand with my 5-year-old daughter who had brought home fresh picked carrots and cucumbers from her child care last summer. Full of pride, she had grown them with the other children at the centre. Not only does she now rave about vegetables and eat them eagerly, she reminds us to compost our produce peelings and has shown me how to save and sprout seeds for planting in our own garden this summer. She pays attention to plants, worms and other forms of life with a new respect and appreciation.

Sadly, such a connection to nature has been slipping away from the world's children. The Focus section inside this issue of *Interaction* discusses this disconnect and what child care practitioners and early educators can do to rediscover the benefits of paying attention to nature. Find out how to combat "nature deficit disorder" as coined by Richard Louv in his highly acclaimed book, *Last Child in the Woods*, which is reviewed in the *Opinions* section. This issue represents part one of the focus on connecting children to nature and greening child care, which will be continued in the fall 2009 issue of *Interaction*.

The *Ideas* Journal looks at how early childhood practitioners face mixed and competing messages on health issues as they try to determine how best to promote young children's optimal well-being.

We also invite you to bring your ideas and inspirations, rants and raves to the 2009 Early Childhood Education Conference, co-hosted by Manitoba Child Care Association and CCCF. Join us in Winnipeg Manitoba, May 28-30 for *Where the Rivers Meet: Raising the Level in Early Childhood Education*.

Claire McLaughlin, editor
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The mission of the Canadian Child Care Federation is to achieve excellence through early learning and child care. Its core focus areas are best and promising practice; capacity building; and collaborations, networks and partnerships.

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Inside the Federation

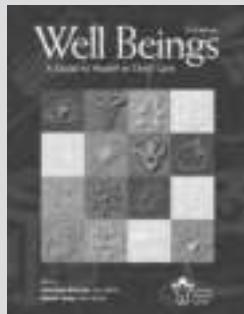
Farewell to Member Council Reps

Shauna Coons has been on Member Council since August 2007 in the appointed role of Training Institution Liaison. We thank Shauna for all she has done for the CCCF and all that she will continue to do on our behalf.

After eight years as CCCF's Rural Liaison representative on Member Council, **Jane Wilson** has stepped down from her role to give more time to family and personal pursuits. Jane brought a strong rural perspective to the CCCF. We will miss Jane and wish her all the best.

Third Edition of Well Beings: A Guide to Health in Child Care

The Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) has launched the new edition of *Well Beings: A Guide to Health in Child Care*. Edited by Canadian paediatrics practitioners, Dr. Denis Leduc and Danielle Grenier, this comprehensive reference is a must for child care centres, agencies and home-based providers, early childhood instructors and students, and public health professionals.



The Canadian Child Care Federation was among the key members of the editorial board along with several CPS member pediatricians and representatives from public health and an extensive network of expert reviewers from across Canada.

The third edition of *Well Beings: A Guide to Health in Child Care* can be ordered by visiting the CPS online bookstore at: www.cps.ca

CCCF - Spokesperson for UNICEF's Child Care Transition Report Card on ECEC

CCCF President, Don Giesbrecht was called on to represent the Child Care sector in Canada for UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 8: The Childcare Transition, published in December, 2008. The report highlights Canada's dismal record at investing in quality early learning and child care — ranking the nation last in overall early childhood services for families.

The UNICEF report supports the CCCF's previous calls for national political leadership on early childhood care and education. The report also clearly emphasizes that not investing in early learning services, even in tough economic times, is the wrong direction to go. Investing in early learning and child care not only supports the family in sustaining itself economically in the present, but also builds support for the family and the child in the future. The report is available on the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre website at www.unicef.ca/irc8

Keep Your Files Safe and Support CCCF!

Worried about the safety of your electronic files? Think of the consequences of losing important information and privacy details about the families at your child care program. A Winnipeg-based company, Seerx, offers a service called GotData™ that provides secure back-up of files and off-site storage at a reasonable cost. Now, through a special partnership, whenever a CCCF member uses GotData™, the company will donate a percentage of its proceeds back to CCCF. For more details, visit the CCCF website (www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca) and click on the Got Data™ ad.

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INSIDE THE FEDERATION

Engaging, Enabling and Empowering Practitioners to Advance the Children's Environmental Agenda

There is a growing appetite in Canada for information on toxic substances in consumer products and other environmental threats to child health. Furthermore, there is a demand and a need for clear, practical advice on what caregivers and parents can do to safeguard children from these hazards. To address this, the Canadian Child Care Federation, in partnership with the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE), has been involved in a project that has facilitated over 46 workshops and train-the-trainer sessions to practitioners across Canada since 2005. These insightful workshops led by health promotion coordinator Myriam Beaulne, have *engaged, enabled* and *empowered* over 1000 practitioners on the topic of children's environmental health. The initial project was so successful that CCCF received additional funding and an extension to further the agenda.

To find out more about children's environmental health news that is related to your best practice, email **Robin McMillan** rmcmillan@cccf-fcsge.ca and sign up for our new children's environmental health listserv. For more information and resources, visit <http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca>

From Genes to Child Care Top 10 Studies on Early Childhood Development for 2007

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development proudly presents its special issue of the CEECD Bulletin. It highlights 10 of the best scientific papers published on Early Childhood Development in 2007 by teams of investigators who include at least one member based in a Canadian institution.

Themes included are genetic structure and development, outcomes associated with low birth weight babies, mood disorders in pregnancy, breast-feeding and child care use and quality.

It can be consulted at the following link: <http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca/documents/BulletinVol7No2Dec08ANG.pdf>

Spotlight on a Local Champion in Children's Environmental Health

In 2007, the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE) together with Ontario Public Health Association received Ontario Trillium Foundation funding to begin work on a *Local Champion's on Children's Environmental Health Project*. Today there are 45 newly-minted Local Champions from 6 regions across Ontario who have received intensive CPCHE training, support and resources on children's environmental health issues.

One local champion is Nancy Brown, a professor at Ontario's Seneca College in the Early Childhood Education Department. This past fall, Nancy turned her passion for children's environmental health toward mobilizing peers, faculty, students and administrators at Seneca College to host and convene a two-day conference in September entitled: *Growing Up Healthy and Green: A Dialogue – Environmental Health and Green Practice in Child Care*. This well orchestrated conference positioned children's environmental health issues squarely in the minds of key professionals including; municipal day care supervisors, policy makers, child care practitioners from early years centres and child care organizations, faculty and students from other settings, and allied health professionals like health promoters and public health nurses. With over 300 attendees over two days, Nancy will be well remembered for this successful effort in bringing children's environmental health to the forefront in the child care sector. Nancy continues to champion children's environmental health into daily lectures, curriculum and learning lab instruction at Seneca College.

For more information on the Local Champions, please email: info@healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

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INSIDE THE FEDERATION

A Thank You to Our Sponsors!

CCCCF's giving campaign is going strong and we thank everyone who has contributed so far. If you haven't donated yet, check out our online donation form. Visit our website at www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca and click on the "Donate Now" button. It's quick and easy and you'll receive a tax receipt for your charitable donation.

We'd also like to thank our recent corporate donors for their generous contributions.



If you represent an organization, or if you know of an organization that would be interested in supporting the work of CCCC, please contact Kim Tytler at ktytler@cccf-fcsge.ca or (613) 729-5289 ext. 242.

Finally, we would like to recognize the organizations who have **advertised with *Interaction*** magazine this past year.

*Where the
Rivers Meet:*

Raising the Level in Early Childhood Education



Manitoba Child Care
Association



Government of
Manitoba
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in partnership



32nd Annual Early Childhood
Education Conference
Victoria Inn, Winnipeg, Manitoba
May 28 - 30, 2009



FROM WHERE I SIT

The Future of Early Learning and Child Care in Canada

I'm not sure how many attended the Connecting Early Child Development and Schools, conference in Montreal, a Pan-Canadian Summit hosted by the Council for Early Child Development. I was there and it was a very interesting few days. The audience was mainly school board folks from across Canada. There appears to be great momentum and encouragement in the support of the idea that the school systems in our country should take a leadership role in the education of all children 0-18.

We are in very interesting times that hold both great promise and some challenges.

It is my opinion that our messaging needs to be about supporting an integrated, collaborative model. This model must include social services, health and education. We need to ensure that our public resources are used collectively to best serve the children and families in Canada.

Today's Family - Early Learning and Child Care is a community based, charitable organization located in Ontario. We have spent time thinking and dreaming about a better system for children. And we've asked ourselves and others hard questions.

I would like to share some of that thinking with you.

The Future of Early Learning and Child Care in Canada: Innovative Possibilities in a Changing Environment

Principles:

We've come up with a number of core principles that have helped guide our thinking in these changing times. First, quality matters. The universal program must build on best practices for children and must integrate both learning and care.

The model must be child and family-centred. The children must experience a "seamless" day and their parents should have a single point of entry to the system.

The model must recognize that healthy communities share the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of children. When parents, the education system and community-based organizations (centre and home based child care, Ontario Early Years Centres, resource programs, public health, libraries, parks and recreation, children's mental health etc.) collaborate as equals, children and their families are provided with the best possible environments in which to grow and prosper.

Government funding for a universal program must be targeted to the not-for-profit and/or public system.

Messages and Recommendations:

- Early learning and child care programs in Canada currently deliver full day (7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) early learning programs.
- The implementation model must accommodate parental choice; knowing that the learning outcomes for children will be achieved in the early learning and child care program.
- We urge the government to build on the work of the Ontario Best Start expert panel and use the *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)* framework as the organizing structure for the development of curriculum.
- All professionals who work with children under the age of 6 should be trained in child development, family support and curriculum development and implementation. All folks working with children including early childhood educators and teachers should be supported to obtain additional credentials.
- A new degree level credential that focuses broadly on the key concepts of both early learning AND care would be a positive step forward towards the capacity for a truly integrated system.
- Effective partnerships must be developed with Special Needs Resourcing (Resource Teacher Programs) to support a seamless and inclusive approach for children with special needs and their parents.
- The development and implementation of a full day early learning program provides an ideal opportunity to revisit the entire funding structure of the complex system of supports that currently comprise early learning programs. We would urge the government to take advantage of this opportunity to create a more streamlined, base-funded system.

Marni Flaherty

CCCF Member Council - Representing Home Child Care Association of Ontario
Chief Executive Officer
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BOOK REVIEW

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder

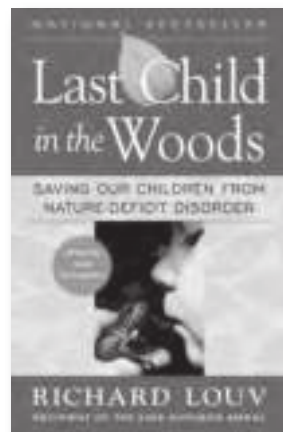
Reviewed by Jane Hewes, PhD

Chair, Early Learning and Child Care
Grant MacEwan College

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder is a deeply thoughtful and inspiring call to action. Richard Louv describes nature deficit disorder as the “cumulative effect of withdrawing nature from children’s experience.” The symptoms include “increased stress, trouble paying attention, and feelings of not being rooted in the world.” Nature deficit disorder affects families as well as children. And early childhood educators can do something about it.

Louv has done a remarkable piece of journalistic research, weaving together evidence and anecdote with the thread of plain old common sense, to paint a picture of the broad and far reaching impact that Nature has on our lives. The book is full of fascinating, useful and often startling facts. Did you know that the best predictor of preschool children’s activity levels is simply being outdoors? Did you know that increased access to nature and natural environments has a positive effect on children with ADD and ADHD? Did you know that Jane Goodall slept with earthworms under her pillow as a child?

The message in this book is much deeper and more profound than turning off the TV and getting children outdoors. Access to Nature



By Richard Louv
Chapel Hill, NC:
Algonquin Books 2005



We must be intentional about bringing nature indoors...buckets of fallen leaves and pails of dirt for muddy, messy, mucky indoor play. We need to open the doors and the windows and invite nature back inside. And we will have to confront some issues – risk, mess, gender.

– not just time outdoors - is essential for children’s social, physical, emotional and spiritual health. Louv argues that adults as well as children have become disconnected from the natural environment, largely as a result of urbanization, technology and the pace of modern work and family life. Schools no longer teach natural history. Families no longer keep backyard gardens. The cumulative effect on our children is profound. Children are living “nature parched” childhoods and as Louv insists, cannot and will not become stewards of our increasingly fragile natural environment unless they build a relationship with Nature in childhood.

“In nature a child finds freedom, fantasy and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace.” One of the best things about this book is its emphasis on the fundamental spiritual affinity between children and nature, one that is tied at a very deep level to lifelong well being. For children this experience is about being part of something much bigger than themselves. As you read this book, you will become keenly aware that nature isn’t so



natural any more – or so close to the backdoor – and because we have become disconnected from it, we no longer feel safe or comfortable in many natural environments.

So, what does creating access to nature mean? Landscaped outdoor parks in cities don't always do the trick. As Louv points out, when was the last time you saw children building a fort in a city park? These environments do not invite children to play. Outdoor playgrounds with commercially produced climbing equipment are sorely lacking in natural elements. With all the best intentions, we have gone indoors with hockey, skating and swimming in Canada, increasing access to physical activity, but decreasing access to nature and to play. At what cost?

Early childhood educators have long understood the value of the diverse sensory experiences that Nature offers to young children – we have daily outdoor play experiences all year round. We've read Robin Moore and Mary Rivkin. But it always helps to have a reminder to reflect on these fundamental values in our practice. Reading this book really made me think – do we really give children access to Nature simply by taking them outdoors? Are there enough plants and bushes and trees for climbing and hiding? Is there enough grass and dirt for

digging and running around? Are there flowers to pick? These are the simple things that we seem to have lost sight of. We must be intentional about bringing nature indoors...buckets of fallen leaves and pails of dirt for muddy, messy, mucky indoor play. We need to open the doors and the windows and invite nature back inside. And we will have to confront some issues – risk, mess, gender.

Louv's book is chock block full of wonderful quotes and great stories, perfect for sharing with families. There is a little something for every kind of reader – those interested in scientific evidence, those drawn to poetry and metaphor and the spirituality of nature and those just looking for some down to earth common sense advice on raising healthy children. The revised edition published in 2008 adds a field guide with **"100 Actions We Can Take" including ideas for hands-on experiences with children.**

Early childhood has always been about changing the world and early childhood educators have always been up for a good mission. Louv offers great hope and many concrete starting points in the final pages of the book. If we can save the children, maybe the children can save the planet. I guess we better get busy.

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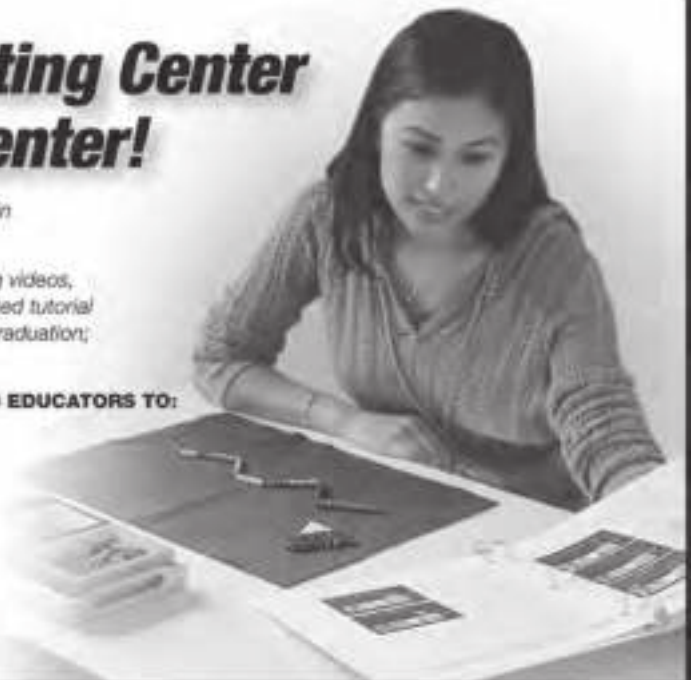
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Philosophy: The North American Montessori Center subscribes to the view that education should be progressive and needs to provide an open-ended view of the Montessori approach to Early Childhood Development. It seeks to harmonize the classical Montessori method with contemporary psychological, educational and social models. Blending Early Childhood Education with the Montessori method has been proved to be sensitive, intelligent and fruitful.



What's Wrong with Colouring Books?

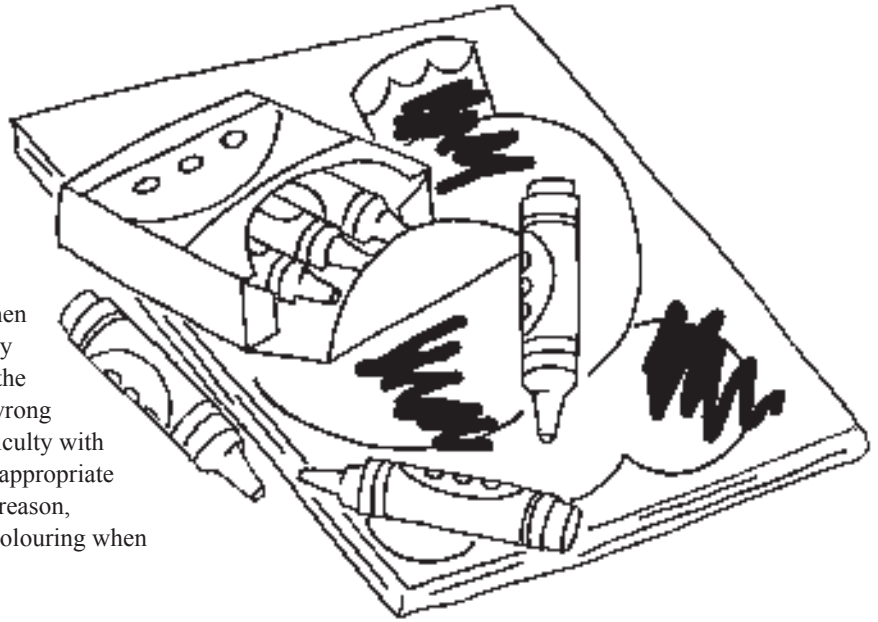
by Christine McLean

One of the first questions that parents (and sometimes Early Childhood Educators) ask when confronted with the concept of developmentally appropriate practice, especially as it relates to the promotion of children's creativity is "What's wrong with colouring books?" People have some difficulty with imagining why these would not be considered appropriate activities to present to children. After all, they reason, "Children love colouring books!" or "I loved colouring when I was little."

This is true – we all have fond memories of opening a brand new package of crayons and using them to colour in our latest Barbie or Disney colouring book or that adorable picture of a group of farmyard animals. What could possibly be wrong with that? The answer is...there is nothing wrong with that. Just like there is nothing wrong with our memories of going to the store to buy a big bag of BBQ chips and wolfing the whole bag down with a can of Pepsi, or our memories of sitting in front of the TV for an entire Saturday afternoon watching cartoons. The point is, that although colouring books, like chips, Pepsi or an afternoon of cartoon watching, can be a fine occasional indulgence, in the long run they do nothing to promote children's healthy growth or development and, if used to excess, they can actually have a negative effect on children's overall development.

The fact is that early childhood educators know so much more about how to promote children's creativity, critical thinking and problem solving abilities and would no more consider colouring books an acceptable activity as they would consider potato chips an acceptable substitute for a vegetable at lunch. ECEs know that children need to be able to express themselves in many ways, with art being one of them, and to provide them with the pre-drawn shapes found in colouring books would be the same as providing them with a pre-written script that the children would need to use whenever they wanted to talk.

When children have access to crayons, markers, paint, pens, pencils, chalk and lots and lots of blank paper in all shapes,



sizes and textures, then miraculous images start to emerge. Children become immersed in the process of art – they experiment with the paint on a brush, they try all kinds of different hand movements with the markers, they experiment with making shapes, they begin to assign meaning to their drawings and they begin to use drawing and sketching as a means to communicate. To rob them of these opportunities of discovery and expression is to deny them the chance to realize their full potential as artists, writers, readers and critical thinkers. Freedom of expression in art leads to creative expression in other areas as well. It is an essential foundation for reading, writing, mathematics and scientific reasoning. Fostering creative expression is an integral component of all high quality early childhood programs.

So, knowing all this, what are the reasons why we still see colouring books in some early childhood programs? Let's have a look at some of the common reasons along with a counter argument that can be used to dispel each of the following colouring book myths:

1. *Colouring in colouring books helps to promote fine motor development and eye-hand coordination.* Most activities in an early childhood program help to promote these two areas of development...putting pegs in pegboards, stringing wooden beads, putting together puzzles, building with blocks, using crayons, markers and paintbrushes, drawing, sketching, writing and the list goes on. Children



will engage in many constructive and developmentally appropriate activities that will promote eye hand coordination and fine motor development. They don't need colouring sheets.

2. *Parents send them in with the children and I don't want to take them away.* This one is a little tougher. It calls upon the need for good communication between the program and the home. ECEs need to recognize that parents are the experts when it comes to their particular child, but the ECEs are the experts when it comes to child development and developmentally appropriate programming. It is a good idea to talk about the philosophy of the program, including the importance that is placed on creative expression, upfront with the parents so they know what types of activities the children will be involved in while they are in the program. Providing parents with all kinds of concrete evidence of the wonderfully creative work that is happening at the program by displaying documentation of the children's work will also help parents to see how creative and expressive their children can be when they are provided with the time, the materials and the encouragement to communicate using the "many languages" of childhood. Just as a program would discourage parents from sending in junk food on a regular basis, the program should be able to discourage parents from sending in toys and materials with their child which would not be in keeping with the philosophy of the program.
3. *But the children love them....* Of course the children love them because the manufacturers of these products know exactly how to attract the attention of the children by using bright colours on the cover and/or featuring popular children's characters such as Dora the Explorer or well loved Sesame Street friends. Children also love BBQ chips and Pepsi but that doesn't mean there is a place for these things in a well run, high quality early childhood program.
4. *I coloured with colouring books and I turned out OK.* Well, that's true enough – you turned out fine. But



imagine how wonderful you'd be if you were provided with lots of opportunities to create, imagine, problem solve, think, explore and discover with a wide array of creative art materials. Perhaps you had these opportunities as well and you've been able to reach your full creative potential. But, if your childhood was like mine and like so many others, we turned out fine despite some of the educational practices that we experienced, not because of them. But now, for the most part, we know better – we've learned more about the pedagogy of early childhood education and we are able to share best practices from high quality programs from around the world. We are constantly discovering more about how children learn and about the importance of the early years. Times

change and we need to keep up with the times.

And, while we are comparing our childhoods with the childhood of today, we can also look to the freedom that a lot of us had as children, compared with today's child. Without the lure of video games, computers, DVDs 'designed' for infants and toddlers and 100 channel TV with 24 hour children's programming, we were able to spend lots of time playing. We were able to make up our own rules, use our imaginations, negotiate the terms of our play with our friends, and mostly without adult assistance or intervention. Today's child does not have this same luxury. Their world is dominated, in large part, by adult imposed expectations. Any chance we can give them to use their imaginations and creativity will help to offset the 24/7 pressure that they have to conform to the rules, ideas and expectations of others.

So – where does that leave us with colouring books and colouring sheets? Should they be eliminated from children's lives? Absolutely not. Just as I wouldn't advocate the elimination of occasional instances of chocolate for breakfast or Saturday morning cartoons, colouring books are bound to be a part of children's lives. Should colouring books be a regular part of an early childhood program? Again, the answer is absolutely not. Colouring books represent inadequate practice. They are simply not good enough for what our children need in order to reach their optimal potential.

Christine McLean is a Program Consultant of Child Care Services Department of Health and Community Services.

**ELCC Study on Numeracy & Literacy Practices**

Who's counting?

When and How Do We Introduce Number Concepts in Child Care?

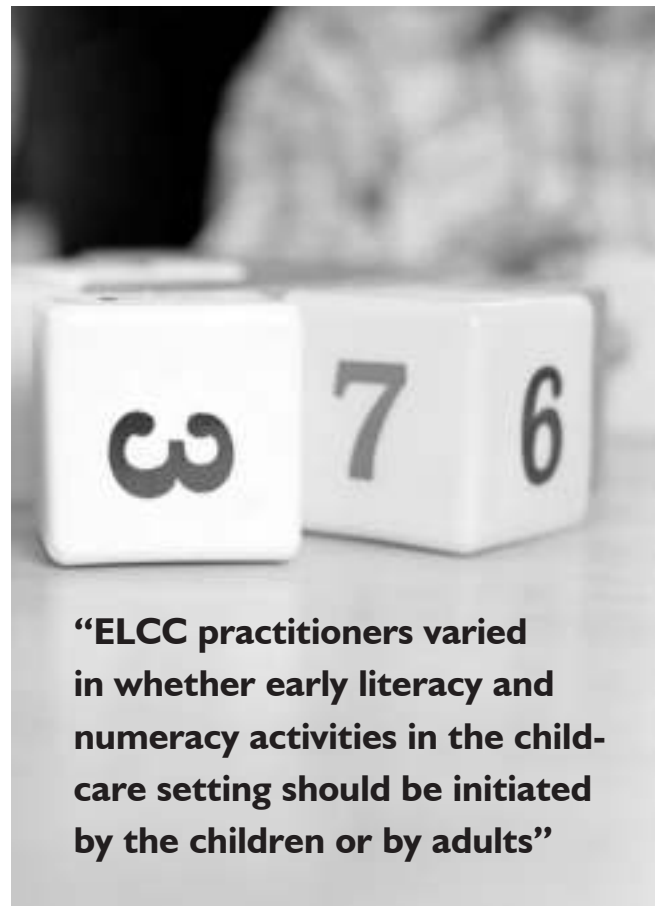
by Lisa Fast, Carla Sowinski,
Jo-Anne LeFevre, Helena Osana,
Sheri-Lynn Skwarchuk, and
Natalia Manay Quian

Competence in mathematics is necessary for individuals to successfully compete in an increasingly scientific and technological world. On international assessments, Canadian children perform better than American children, but nevertheless do not do as well as European and Asian children. Furthermore, because children's competency in mathematics before school entry is very predictive of their later performance, early experiences are critical in getting children off to a good start.

Our goal in this study was to gather information about the early numeracy and literacy knowledge, practices, and beliefs of early learning and child care (ELCC) practitioners. A web survey of Canadian Child Care Federation members and recruiting at two major child care conferences generated 768 respondents. Most were from Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia and were well educated—12% reported university degrees, and almost 60% reported college diplomas. One third worked in administrative and instructor roles, another third worked directly with children in child care centres and the rest worked directly with children in their home, or in nursery schools or other programs.

Perceived Knowledge of Numeracy and Literacy and Professional Development

We predicted that ELCC practitioners may have little knowledge of what constitutes 'early numeracy' (number



“ELCC practitioners varied in whether early literacy and numeracy activities in the child-care setting should be initiated by the children or by adults”

concepts) or of how to deliver numeracy content using developmentally-appropriate practices. Consistent with this prediction, respondents said they felt significantly more knowledgeable about early literacy than about early numeracy. They reported attending early numeracy professional development less frequently than other learning activities and were less aware of the availability of early numeracy learning opportunities in comparison to professional development concerning literacy, social skills, or health and safety.

Knowledge about Children's Capabilities

ELCC practitioners varied in how knowledgeable they were about children's capabilities in numeracy and literacy, and their knowledge was related to their experience in working with children. Based on their responses about the ages at which children become capable of early numeracy and literacy



activities (e.g., count to 10, read a few words), the respondents clustered in two groups: one group indicated that children were capable of these skills at a younger age (on average, about a year earlier) than the other group. This “capable younger” group gave responses that were consistent with the developmental literature on when typical children master these skills. This group was also more likely to have worked with children for 10 or more years as compared to the “capable older” group.

Practices

Respondents reported how frequently they participated in a set of literacy, numeracy and social-emotional activities: 428 respondents worked with preschoolers (i.e., children aged 3 and 4 years) and 156 respondents worked with toddlers (i.e., aged 1 and 2 years). In general, for both age groups, ELCC practitioners reported pre-reading and quantity activities less frequently than language and counting activities, suggesting that although ELCC practitioners engage in many *basic* literacy and numeracy activities, they are doing fewer *advanced* activities within these areas.

Beliefs

A majority of ELCC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social and emotional development is the primary goal of early childhood education. However, the majority of respondents *also* believed that it is their job to teach children about letters, and they believed that numeracy and literacy skills should be assessed regularly. ELCC practitioners also varied in whether early literacy and numeracy activities in the child-care setting should be initiated by the children or by adults or a moderate combination. The Moderate and Child-initiated groups tended to underestimate children’s capabilities. They were more likely than the Adult-guided group to report being anxious about their own mathematics skills and they reported that children are not capable of early arithmetic until age 5. Accordingly, they were less likely to report frequent use of numeracy activities beyond basic counting, presumably because they believe such activities would not be a developmentally appropriate practice for the children in their care.



“Although ELCC practitioners engage in many *basic* literacy and numeracy activities, they are doing fewer *advanced* activities within these areas”

Recommendations

The results of this survey suggest some first steps for improving and supporting early numeracy education for ELCC practitioners. Given that children learn best in a developmentally appropriate environment, providing information about the early capabilities of children may convince ELCC practitioners that early mathematics is developmentally appropriate. Accordingly, the survey results are being used in partnership with the Canadian Child Care Federation and the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLRNet) to develop an evidence-based Resource Sheet that outlines children’s early numeracy capabilities.

ELCC practitioners also need information about fun and effective early numeracy activities that will increase children’s participation, encourage children to initiate these activities, and minimize opting out. Child initiation is a key belief of over one-third of the respondents, and many say they no longer use worksheets or flashcards,

because they do not see these materials as developmentally appropriate. Many respondents suggested they want to learn about other age-appropriate early numeracy activities beyond counting, and that the activities assessed in the survey had given them ideas about what they could do. Because the less-experienced practitioners are least knowledgeable about age appropriate early numeracy activities, materials directed at college-level pre-service programs would have the most impact.

This survey of Canadian early learning and child care practitioners highlights two key opportunities to improve the state of early numeracy education in Canada. First, because ELCC practitioners are aware that they need to acquire knowledge about early numeracy, and that they have few opportunities to address that need, targeting pre-service and in-service training about children’s capabilities will open the door to heightened attention towards children’s numeracy development. Second, many practitioners in the field, are eager to acquire more knowledge about developmentally-appropriate activities covering the range of early numeracy – from arithmetic to measurement. Resources to address both of these opportunities are in development in partnership with the CCCF and CLLRNet.



The Feelings Tree

Setting the Stage for Children to Articulate their Feelings

by Julie Hansen

Setting the stage for social and emotional development in early childhood environments is not always as easy as we might think. How do we as educators take the learning past the traditional circle time question, “How Do You Feel Today”? How do we provide opportunities and experiences to foster the growth of healthy self concepts within our programs and how do we empower children to express their emotions in a safe way?

The Bayshore Gardens Children’s Centre 3 to 5 team (a program of the Vancouver Society of Children’s Centres) discovered that there is no simple answer. We asked for assistance from The PACE program, a therapeutic and educational centre that provides outreach and training for Preschool and Daycare programs as well as a wide variety of other support services to the children and families in the greater Vancouver area. By being creative, working together and most importantly following the children’s lead, the team went on an educational journey of their own.

During a staff team meeting with our PACE consultant, the team discussed the different ways the children in the program communicated their feelings and emotions with peers and staff. We had observed open communication, physical behaviors, and unwillingness to express emotion. The decision was made to focus on teaching the children effective strategies to bridge the gap between feeling emotions and communicating them in a safe way.

Observation was the first step. We looked at how the children used the physical environment to express their feelings with peers. Were we providing comfortable, developmentally appropriate, and soothing spaces? Did these areas provide activities and experiences that met the needs of all the children within our program? Were we promoting open dialog with children and families regarding acknowledgment of feelings that could guide children to successfully convey their emotions in a positive way?



After some reflection with our PACE consultant, our team then looked at how we could make changes to improve our surroundings and inspire the children in the area of emotional development. We started off by creating a cohesive, quiet spot in the classroom that went beyond the standard library corner. We added puppets, a felt board, community figures and stuffed animals to the resources in this area. We were curious to see if these materials would aid the children to articulate their feelings, by offering additional choices when working through problem solving situations with their peers.

The decision was made to move the quiet area next to the tactile table so that the children could explore mediums, such as play dough and squishy balls, when more intense feelings arose. Next, we wanted to figure out how we could help the children to correctly identify their feelings beyond mad, happy and sad in order to say and know how they felt. A poster was put up at child level with pictures of faces depicting different feelings.



Over the next few weeks we saw how the children responded to the changes that we had made. At first the children just appeared to spend more time in that area of the room exploring the materials. Then their discovery grew into more complex play. Having team members situated in the quiet corner to facilitate how the children might use this area during different times of the day proved to be extremely successful.



to the quiet area, we were able to encourage the children that tended to be less verbal with an additional avenue for expressing their feelings. The educators noticed that children would sit together at the table and draw pictures of their families, friends and what they had done in the program on any given day. This also provided the team with excellent guidance opportunities, often opening the

door for further conversations about friendship, feelings and communication.

One afternoon an educator took two puppets over to a group of children that were involved in a problem solving situation in the house keeping center. She asked the two girls to tell her what had happened using the puppets. The educator then asked the girls if they would like to look at the poster and talk about how the situation made each of them feel. After the discussion, the two girls discovered that they had felt several different emotions during the dramatic play situation from happy and excited to frustrated and angry. Not only did this experience provide the children with an opening to express their feelings using the puppets, but by redirecting the children to the feelings chart, the educator provided an opportunity to expand the children's vocabulary and increase language development.

In the quiet area, we noticed that the children gravitated to picture books that highlighted specific feelings. Consequently, educators began offering to read these stories to the children individually and in group situations. The children appeared to use these books as an outlet when particular feelings came up. The books contain simple text and offer examples on how the character identified, reacted to and handled their emotions. We found that the children modeled what they had learned from the books when they found themselves in conflict resolution situations with friends, or in one-on-one situations with team members.

Our PACE consultant suggested that we use art drawing as a tool in our program to help identify feelings and to encourage the development of peer to peer problem solving skills. She also suggested that this would help the children to pinpoint and verbalize their feelings. By providing the children with materials such as pencil crayons and paper at a table adjacent

To celebrate the arrival of spring, one of the educators painted a tree on the window in the quiet corner while another team member sat amongst a group of children at the drawing table admiring the tree. The children suggested that they would like to make leaves for the tree. The educator at the table offered to write "I feel" on the leaves, and the children were encouraged to draw pictures and dictate the stories that she would then write on the leaves. The children began to draw and tell stories articulating a wide variety of feelings and emotions, recalling situations from that day and past experiences using words such as jealous, happy, nervous, excited and worried. The children seemed to be more at ease as they worked at the table talking to each other calmly about their feelings. An overwhelming sense of pride crept over the children, not only for their art work but for the fact that they could acknowledge and communicate their own thoughts and emotions in a positive, safe, and constructive way. Each day there are new contributions to the Feelings Tree in our centre.

Over the months, we have noticed significant growth in the children and it has been reflected in their play. By providing the group with additional options and avenues for self expression, modeling safe and developmentally appropriate communication skills and strategies, and accessing encouraging community resources, the team has become more confident and has gained valuable experience. Together we committed to making the Bayshore Gardens Children's Centre 3 to 5 program a special place for children, families, and educators to thrive.

Julie Hansen is the Program Supervisor at Bayshore Gardens Children's Centre Vancouver Society of Children's Centres and also is the author of *Jack's Magic Hat* that was published by Trafford Publishing in 2004.



Higher Learning Meets Early Learning at Campus Child Care Centre

by Lana Crossman

Simon Fraser University (SFU) is located on 1200 acres atop Burnaby Mountain, British Columbia. It's an idyllic place of higher education for adults, but it's also where over 260 infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children gather daily for quality early learning and child care. The university is home to the SFU Children's Centre, which includes four child care complexes, with 13 programs for children ages 3 months to 12 years. In fall 2009, it will expand again with the addition of two new 3-5 centres.

The centre is an example of a workplace-sponsored child care centre that started as a student-led initiative and expanded as the university recognized the value of investing in child care for its students, staff and faculty.



“You need to be sure you have their (employer’s) support and that they’re committed to be in it over the long term.”



The trek from then to now

The SFU Children's Centre has come a long way since its beginnings in 1968 as a family cooperative. Parent volunteers who were determined to have child care on campus while they attended school used \$500 of university funding and their own hard work to equip five portables set up at various locations throughout the campus.

By the mid-1970s, there were 150 children enrolled in child care at SFU. The university realized that by providing quality child care they could attract more mature students. It awarded \$1.2 million in capital funds to construct a purpose-built child care centre. The architects constructed three buildings

The Simon Fraser University and the SFU Children's Centre partnership is one example of a workplace-sponsored child care model. *Interaction* will look at other examples of such arrangements in future issues.



containing ten separate, family-like units. The buildings are staggered on four different levels on the slope of the mountain, so that each unit has a ground level entrance from its own playground. The playgrounds are placed on the east and west exposures for maximum sunlight. A shared covered walkway, stairwells, administrative office and playgrounds promote an open-door policy and opportunity for children of various age groups to mix and play together.

In 1995 a fourth building, also state-of-the-art, was built with funding provided by the University, the Vancouver Foundation and the BC Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

A source of pride

Kathy Hart, office assistant, has been working at the SFU Children's Centre for 28 years. She says she's proud of the facilities, the innovative playgrounds and top quality equipment. Mostly, however, she's proud of the staff. Of the 50 people working in the centre, 14 have been employees of the centre for over 10 years – impressive in a sector that faces serious retention problems. Almost all of the staff is employed by the centre; only Hart and the Executive Director are staff of the university.

“We have wonderful caregivers and support staff. They have great relationships with the parents and are wonderful with the children. They are proud of their work, involved in professional associations and take advantage of professional development opportunities.”

The university is also proud of the centre and understands its importance in recruiting new students, staff and faculty. In fact, recently the university was awarded recognition in the *Today's Parent* Top 10 list of family-friendly workplaces, in large part due to the SFU Children's Centre.

Pros and cons of arrangement

Aside from the initial funding to build the centre, the university pays for the rent, insurance, major structural repairs to the buildings, support services and recently began covering utility bills for the centre. Parent fees comprise most of the ongoing funding and cover operational costs, such as staff wages, maintenance, supplies and equipment.

Under the licensing agreement with the University, and as a condition for funding, most of the clientele must be university status. The SFU Children's Centre gives priority to students and staff/faculty. Next on the priority list is alumni, followed by families in the surrounding community.



“The university uses our centre as an incentive to attract students and faculty from across the country and outside of Canada. But we have waiting lists like so many child care centres across Canada. Many parents are disappointed when they can't get their child into the centre. They were told about the centre in their interviews and thought it was a given that they would have a space,” says Hart.

As a university-based child care centre, the SFU Children's Centre staff see first-hand the financial struggles faced by student parents – especially foreign students, who are not eligible for government subsidies. Unfortunately because parent fees account for the majority of funding to the centre, there is little flexibility to lower fees.

On the other hand, the convenience of having their children nearby helps student, staff and faculty parents immensely. “Mothers with children in the infant program can stop in to nurse their children. There's also a sense of community because the parents may work and study together, then get to know each other in a more personal way when they meet at the centre to pick up their children,” says Hart.

According to Hart, the most important consideration in entering into a workplace sponsored child care agreement is ensuring that the employer truly supports it. “You need to be sure you have their support and that they're committed to be in it over the long term.”



HEALTH WATCH

Screen Time Replacing Physical Activity Time in Children

Most children today are spending way too much time engaging in non-active screen time activities. Essential physical activity has been replaced with time spent in front of interactive media such as television, video games and the computer. Canadian children and youth are spending hours, immediately after-school and on weekends, accumulating screen time and being inactive.

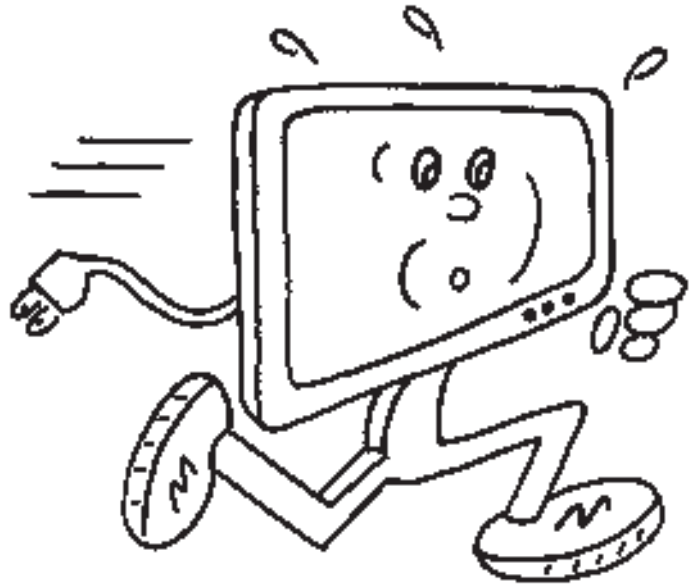
The 2008 Active Healthy Kids Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, indicates that the screen time grade has dropped from a "D-" to a distressing "F" and new data indicates that even preschoolers are consuming a high dose of screen time.

"In each weekday, young Canadians are averaging 5-6 hours of screen time, and this climbs to between 6-7.5 hours per day on the weekend," says, Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, **Active Healthy Kids Canada**. "Also disturbing is research indicating that preschoolers as early as three months of age have developed viewing habits approaching two hours of TV per day."

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends no more than 1 hour of TV per day for preschoolers. With respect to school-aged children and youth, there are recommendations for no more than two hours per day of TV or leisure-related screen time. Children have developed a dependency on screen time as a source of leisure related activity. High screen time behavior is associated with low fitness levels and low self-efficacy for physical activity.

Working Collaboratively To Reduce Screen Time

When it comes to reducing children and youth screen time allotment, collectively there are many things that we can do.



Parents

Parents are role models and should mediate where and when kids are in front of the screen. Screen time for children and youth must be balanced with physical activity time. It is also important, that family time is spent being physically active and ensuring there are many opportunities for fun free play and outdoor play.

Practitioners – Educators and Community Leaders

School and community programs that include time management strategies for reducing screen time and increasing physical activity during after-school time have been shown to be effective. Practitioners can also develop engaging activities for children and youth where they can participate in increased physical activity and active play.

Easy Ways To Get Active Everyday

- Choose to walk or use your bicycles to go to work or school or for errands
- Invite your children's friends to do activities at the park, at a community centre or at your home with your children
- Congratulate and praise your kids when they do active things. It is important to them.
- Find a ball. Throw it, catch it, roll it. You will all develop skills that will be useful for all sorts of sports activities.
- Become "tele-active" Stand up, sit down, walk in place. Get your heart pumping between commercials and between video games.
- Threats and reprimands rarely work. Adopt a positive attitude towards the enjoyment of physical activity.

For more information on the report card and on practical tips for reducing screen time and getting active, visit the Active Healthy Kids Website at www.activehealthykids.ca.



A Common Dilemma for Early Childhood Educators

Mixed and Competing Health Messages

by Patricia Chorney Rubin & Joyce Gee

Although early childhood educators recognize their essential role in protecting children and supporting their well-being, many may not view themselves as 'health promoters'. (Best Start Resource Centre, 2006). Unless affiliated with a community health agency, early childhood educators may not recognize the extent and importance of their health promoting roles. These roles and responsibilities with respect to health are varied and include:

- protecting children from harm
- supporting well being
- healthy role modeling,
- communication and supportive relationships with families
- collaboration with health professionals, and
- referrals to reliable sources of health information

Communication about health issues

Every day it seems that there is new research or health-related advice in the media. It is challenging for anyone to keep abreast of the amount of health

information and advice released by many sources on multiple topics. It is also difficult to know what information is legitimate and what is really only marketing of various "healthy" products. Early childhood educators and families can become overwhelmed by the pace of change in health related knowledge and recommended practice.

Fortunately, families and early childhood educators are partners where it comes to promoting children's health in the program. There are so many health issues that overlap home and child care and require communication with each other. Shared concerns include hand hygiene, oral/dental care, nutritious eating, sleep patterns, physical activity, playing safely outdoors while encouraging exploration and even thoughtful use of 'screen time' on computers, movies and television.

When communication flows easily, everyone benefits – the child, the family and the early childhood program. For example, with regard to

sun safety, it is common knowledge that one or more serious sunburns from birth to 10 years of age substantially increases the risk of cancer lifelong; overall exposure to the sun, even without burns, is a predictor of skin cancer later (Thomas et al, 2007). This reality means that working together with families to ensure consistent sun safe knowledge, policies and practices in the program has benefits for the children that go beyond the day care day.

The same statement about communication and consistency may be said for other health practices as well. The adults in children's lives can work together to offer consistent, balanced messages and role modeling regarding behaviour that will benefit life-long healthy habits and support prevention of acute and chronic diseases. Families and early childhood educators need to discuss and agree on practices in daily routines such as eating and sleeping. Families have different routines and needs which must be taken into consideration, as long as they are not

harmful. Cultural and lifestyle diversity must be respected to create as much continuity for the child as possible.

However, a number of barriers can get in the way of the ideal scenario described above. Some of these barriers are: competing time pressures, competing values, different messages from various levels of government and health agencies.

One example of competing time pressures is when families do not have the time for breakfast, or perhaps the child is not yet ready to eat in the morning rush to get to work and the centre. Upon arrival the child may have missed snack or would prefer to play rather than eat. Parents can feel guilty- and believe that the early childhood educators will ensure that the child will eat soon at the program. When they find out later that their child did not eat snack, they are angry and concerned. However, the educators had not realized that the child had come in without eating, and of course respected the child's decision to wait until lunch. This illustrates how important it is for parents to believe that they won't be judged, so that they don't hesitate to share this information on those mornings.

Physical activity and outdoor safety

Educators know that providing preschool children with several daily opportunities to be physically active, especially outdoors, is an integral part of a quality program. Outdoor green spaces, in particular, tend to be beneficial as they provide more options than climbing equipment for children of varying needs and abilities. Exploring nature is a joy that should be a right in childhood. Greening the space brings in trees, shrubs, rocks, and logs to define a variety of places in which to run, climb, hide, and socialize. Natural movable

materials offer opportunities for imaginative play and physical activity such as raking leaves or shoveling sand. With regard to outdoor play, we have found the best arrangement is to have flexible schedules to allow for more frequent and shorter periods of outdoor time. However, regulations regarding staff supervision- ratio at all times - render flexibility difficult. Materials found in nature- rocks, tree stumps, small pond-like containers often need to be removed in order to pass playground inspection or varying degrees on interpretation of policies. However, communicating with families and regulators about the benefits of greening may result in a shared commitment toward this goal.

Early childhood educators are important role models for daily physical activity. Assuring families that television viewing is not a regular part of the child's day in the program sends a message that screen time is not a necessary part of a preschooler's education. On the other hand, we have found that if our programs include television or DVD viewing as a weekly routine, the message we are sending is that sitting in front of a screen for an extended time must be good practice since it is highlighted every week in our program. Clear messaging is essential and can influence family beliefs regarding screen time.

If families are confident that their children are getting the physical activity they need during the day, it helps them view the early childhood educators as partners in their child's healthy living. Many families have little if no time or opportunity during the week for outdoor play, especially considering our society's worries about safety with no tolerance for risk. Educators and families may be able to share suggestions for enjoyable but simple physical activity ideas indoors as well.

Legislation and practice issues

As individuals and as practitioners, the core of health knowledge and best practice for promoting children's health can seem under siege with the rapid changes in some health related requirements and recommendations. Sometimes changes in information lead to change in the form of government requirements with little consultation and consideration of the realities of day to day life in early childhood programs. There are many legislative agencies overlooking licensed child care and they all have their own set of health, safety and nutrition expectations and rules. Compliance with all these rules can require so much time and structure that early childhood educators are left with less and less opportunity for thoughtful and responsive practice.

Although optimal infection control is an essential consideration in early childhood settings, legislative and other expectations can require many daily steps that are time consuming and can present barriers to children's exploration, play and learning. One example of this is water play. Of course infection control practices must be followed to prevent the transmission and spread of disease, but some public health requirements in early childhood settings are making water play for young children prohibitive. It is impractical to expect staff to empty, sanitize and air dry communal water play tables twice a day. Of note, is that *Well Beings* (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2008, 157) recommends that the communal water table be changed once daily and: 'if the water looks cloudy'. These recommendations are reasonable. Young children lose out when unnecessary and time consuming practices take precedent over reasonable and developmentally appropriate practices. These situations also place educators in a quandary – believing they have no choice but to follow stringent health standards

that straitjacket what they know is developmentally optimal curriculum.

Another challenge, for child care centres in public school environments, can be the perplexing differences in public health and licensing expectations. An example is children while 'at school' eating lunch on the gym or lunch room floor where many shoes have trampled, and no expectation or opportunity to wash hands before eating. Compare that scenario for those same children in after school licensed child care programs, where tables must be cleaned and sanitized, snack placed on a plate or paper towel, and there is an expectation and opportunity for the children to wash their hands before eating as a lifelong routine.

What messages do children and families take away about the importance of learning hygiene practices - do they believe that the child care program is too 'picky', or that the school is too 'lax'? The undermining of learning hand washing as an important lifelong hygiene practice is also underway in public health jurisdictions that expect and encourage the routine use of hand sanitizers in child care centres (see discussion in article *Health Issues in Early Childhood: Mixed and Competing Messages that Face Parents and Educators*).

What about children in schools where the playground equipment is 'off bounds' as unsafe while they are on 'child care time' but obviously perfectly fine for the same children on 'school time' (i.e. during recesses, lunch times)? These issues are perplexing enough for the early childhood educators, likely even more so for children and families. How do the educators explain the contradiction- the equipment is safe for the same children at certain times of the day and hazardous at other times?

When early childhood educators and parents feel that their past practices are now considered hazardous or

unhealthy, they can be plagued with feelings of guilt and incompetence. For example, the Ontario legislation for all schools and child care centres to test and flush their water systems daily to minimize neurotoxin damage from lead ingestion, may have some practitioners wondering what damage has already been done without this flushing practice in years gone by. What other health promoting practices have they 'missed' over the years, and how has their "not knowing" affected the long term health of children under their care? For example, research about toxic chemicals and environmental concerns are not transferred quickly enough to early childhood agencies.

Sometimes the awareness is through a media source but there is no government or authorized professional follow-up to lead us into day to day practices. One example is the Bisphenol A bottle issue which was spearheaded by Environmental Defence (<http://www.toxicnation.ca/bpaqa>), resulting in action by Health Canada to ban the use of this chemical in baby bottles. Current public concern about the levels of lead in toys and children's jewelry manufactured in China has pressured Health Canada to begin a Lead Risk Reduction Strategy which will eventually reduce lead exposure to children in Canada. While these are welcome initiatives they are not especially helpful in making immediate decisions about older products currently in use.

Strategies that would help to inform early childhood educators:

- We have found that involving parents in all aspects of the program allows educators to learn more about practices at home and eases understanding of health practices. The educator is responsive to the family's concerns, creating an

environment of mutual respect. The educators take care not to abandon important cultural values but to make adjustments when it seems reasonable, and recognize that collaborative relationships are key to effective decision making. An ongoing dialogue among parents, early childhood and health practitioners, can avoid the hysteria (eg. fear of germs) that can result from one perspective that is not 'tempered' by other points of view. This dialogue is also more likely to lead to healthy policy at the agency level, and possibly advocacy at community levels and beyond, which can contribute to health improvements for greater numbers of children

- We believe that there is a need for a regulated body or organization to house all health and safety information focusing on children and families. This body can also research and compile information on health practices from different cultural/ethnic groups so that early childhood educators can better understand and respect the health practices of families from diverse background. This will help foster consistency between early childhood educators and parents/families. A hotline to call for information would be ideal.
- We would like to see legislation around health and safety practices that is more 'seamless' for children who attend both a child care centre and a school.
- Our strategy has been to focus on 'best practices' whenever possible to also promote health. For example, splitting the group for outdoor play makes the transition to the outside easier- smaller group sizes allows us to engage in group games outdoors. Another example is a regular focus on planning for food experiences with children - in our weekly charts in all age group rooms. These nutrition experiences raise the importance of preparing and eating healthy foods and are often a natural

sequeae for communication with families.

- We would advocate that the Canadian Paediatric Society (using *Well Beings*, 2008, 3rd edition) be used as a point of reference for public health agencies across Canada wherever possible in order to create consistent policies and practices as appropriate.

Some of these strategies are within our immediate control and can be incorporated into daily activities and routines. Others involve a commitment to advocacy and open discussion with legislators at a variety of levels. Our efforts are more likely to be successful if we work together. In our experience, active collaboration between parents and staff, together with on-going education, increases the likelihood that early learning and care settings promote the optimal health and well being of all the children for the short and long term.

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Health Issues in Early Childhood

Mixed and Competing Messages that Face Educators and Families

by Barb Pimento

Early childhood educators are inundated, almost daily it seems, with a plethora of mixed and competing messages about health issues as they try to determine how best to promote young children's optimal well-being. They recognize their essential role in protecting children and supporting their well-being.

The compelling science of early childhood development has granted the early years a prominent position in lifelong health status. This has contributed to practitioner and parental concerns about optimal health promotion for young children. The Public Health Agency of Canada identifies 'healthy child development' as one of the twelve key determinants of health. Evidence from studies finds links between the brain and biological pathways, development in early life and subsequent chronic physical and mental disease in adulthood. (Power & Hertzman, 1997). With so much at stake, it is not surprising that we place a high value on best practices in early childhood and yearn for the 'answers' that will support children's long term health status.

Early childhood educators, ECE faculty and students, parents, and health-care professionals who were consulted across Canada in 2007

identified five themes that resonated for all groups:

1. Relationships between parents and professionals are "key" for health information.
2. Income security is a determinant of health. Poverty impacts all levels of health and learning.
3. Mixed messages about health abound: on the internet, media and agencies/ departments.
4. Understanding health literacy with sensitivity to cultural practices is essential.
5. Communities and context matter.

(Canadian Council on Learning, 2008, 23)

Early childhood educators can become overwhelmed by the pace of change in health related knowledge and recommended practice, especially if that change comes in the form of requirements with little consultation and consideration of the realities of day to day life in their programs. As individuals and as practitioners, the core of health knowledge and practice upon which they believed they were best promoting children's health can seem under siege with the rapid changes in some health related requirements and recommendations.

Recent recommendations to improve the federal government's role in child and youth health include:

- a streamlined, integrated way to address child health issues rather than the current 'silo', piecemeal approach
- Eliminating duplication; utilize scarce funds effectively by avoiding 're-inventing' what other programs are already doing well
- Ensuring that the process of evaluation becomes efficient, effective, and measures the right things.

These recommendations come from *Reaching for the Top – A Report from the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth* (Leitch, 2007). With reference to this report, it is evident that the mixed and competing messages that are dispensed from a variety of sources can seem double edged. If governments and their various ministries do not have a consistent vision and messages regarding priorities and practices in children's health, how can families and practitioners be expected to know and implement what is best? The Leitch Report calls for a National Injury Prevention Strategy that would urge the Federal government to take a lead role in consistent legislation to, for example, support helmet use, eliminate toxic toys, and promote booster seats and protective equipment. Similarly, another recent report (CPCHE, 2008) *Vision and Strategy for Children's Health and Environment in Canada* provides a proactive strategy to develop child-protective policies in the areas of chemicals management and consumer product safety. These two reports highlight the need for a consistent approach to benefit children's health.

Routine practices such as physical activity, and nutrition, safety and hygiene, are now rife with options, and over the years have seemed like a moving target. Even consistent healthy messages require prioritizing, a challenge in the busy lives of early childhood programs and families. Two health 'themes' that emerge almost daily in media are: healthy active living and hygiene products and practices.



Healthy active living

The considerable concerns about childhood obesity in Canada, with lifelong implications for individual and population health (Boyce and Keating 2004) have resulted in prompts from multiple sources to increase physical activity, improve nutrition and reduce children's screen time.

- A recent national survey conducted in 2004, (Statistics Canada in Shields, 2005), found that 26% of Canadian children and adolescents aged 2 to 17 years old were overweight or obese
- The prevalence of nutritional problems such as overweight and obesity in the 3-5 year old age group is 21% in Canada (Shields 2005)
- Active Healthy Kids Canada reports that over half of Canadian children are not active enough for optimal growth and development and their 2008 Report Card on Physical Activity gave Canada an F (failing grade) for physical activity levels, and overweight/obesity.
- The Canadian Community Health Survey, (Statistics Canada 2005) reported that children and adolescents who eat fruit and

vegetables 5 or more times a day are substantially less likely to be overweight or obese than their peers who do not.

- The NutriStep study found that more than half of the almost 300 preschoolers weren't getting enough grains and fruit and 45 per cent weren't getting enough vegetables (Simpson et al, 2007).
- Having a television in the bedroom is a strong predictor of being overweight even among preschool-aged children. (Dennisson et al, 2002).

Those statistics, among others, have resulted in recommendations for preschool children such as:

- several short periods of vigorous physical activity throughout the day, that are spontaneous, enjoyable, fit their motor skills and interests, and are outdoors whenever possible. (Timmons, 2007)
- screen time limited to less than 1 to 2 hours per day, and not recommended for children under two. Families may want to consider more active and creative ways to spend time together. (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2003)

- daily consumption of at least 4 vegetables and fruits for 2-3 year olds; 5 for 4-5 year olds (Canada's Food Guide, 2007)

All of these recommendations are most effective with positive adult role modeling. For example, the transmission of cultural and familial beliefs about food and eating require ongoing familial input. (Centre of Excellence for ECD, 2008).

Although each recommendation sounds reasonable, educators and families may find that implementing these 'prescriptions' is a heavy burden, especially when faced with constraints or barriers.

- For many Canadian families, the daily routine is dependent on motorized transportation, to and from work/child care, and parents are left with little time to do something physically active with their child, especially outdoors.
- Competing messages about outdoor safety and risk are often at the top of many agendas, with little tolerance for risk, resulting in educator and parental anxiety about safety of playgrounds and backyards (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2003).
- Many families do not have access to outdoor space, and upon getting home after work, may resort to screen time for their child while preparing dinner. Many child care playgrounds have limited opportunities for climbing, swinging or developing complex motor skills, due to safety concerns and legislation.
- With regard to screen time, the realities of completing tasks without needing to actively supervise their children can contribute to its use both at home and in child care programs.
- The emphasis on cognitive development can sometimes lead educators and families to underestimate the importance of

physical activity, and perhaps they are not aware that physical activity also contributes to brain development (Ratey, 2008, 53)

- In child care, it is costly and time consuming to create diverse menus with choices that address individual and cultural preferences.
- Intensive marketing and availability of fast food and snack food creates aimed at young children, adds to the difficulty of encouraging healthy choices.

Income inequality faced by families and communities can mean that many optimal health practice recommendations seem absurd when one considers their situation:

- If families are dealing with food insecurity and dependence on food banks, it is unlikely they have access to the range and number of fruits and vegetables recommended by Canada's Food Guide.
- When a First Nations community does not even have safe drinking water, the question of the benefits of tap water over bottled water is a mute point.
- Most vegetables and fruits brought in via motorized transportation are sold at prohibitive costs, especially in remote areas. This would have direct effect on the nutrition offered in early childhood programs as well as at home.

Food is an important component of both cultural and individual identity. Every family has traditions and food preferences which influence food choices and mealtime routines. And even with credible research on childhood obesity, Canada has one of the highest rates in the world, suggesting we need more applied research to indicate what prevention programs and measures work (Eastman, 2008). For these and many other reasons, educators and families may feel ineffective in what they

see as their duty to promote children's healthy active living.

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is an issue which illustrates the mixed messages that educators and families may receive from local agencies such as the public health department and from media, who market products to a germ-fearing public. The routine use of alcohol based hand rubs in hospitals and other health care settings has led to assumptions by many that they are universally recommended.

However, the Canadian Paediatric Society in their recent 3rd edition of *Well Beings: A Guide to Health in Child Care* (2008, 148), points out that 'waterless hand rubs are the preferred cleaning agent in health care settings but are not recommended for routine use in child care'. Due to their high percentage of alcohol, care must be taken with children, as they can be harmful if swallowed and are flammable. Hand rubs are not effective if hands are soiled, which is often true for young children. In usual circumstances, identifying when and how to wash hands at home and in early childhood programs is an effective way to reduce transmission.

Recent concerns about epidemics like SARS or the threat of a pandemic flu have heightened public concern about germs. Companies have created a multitude of hygiene products and marketing ploys exploiting and promoting these fears. The public's extensive use of antimicrobial chemical agents, including toys impregnated with them, may be inadvertently contributing to problems such as antibacterial resistance. In addition, children's routine use of over the counter products for hygiene, such as hand rubs and alcohol wipes may undermine their development of healthy life skills like knowing when and how to wash hands.

Notwithstanding the above statements deterring use of hand rubs and antibacterial products in most homes and child care centres, many public health departments across the country encourage their use in early childhood settings, or give the use of alcohol based hand rubs equal status to handwashing with soap and running water. It is not uncommon to see a two or three year old come to the setting with their personal sized bottle of hand rub in a coat pocket. Educators and parents in early childhood programs may have conflicting opinions and practices around this issue, and recommendations or requirements from their local public health agency often contradict the Canadian Paediatric Society position. What can be done to address mixed and competing messages?

Communication

Clear and consistent communication is essential in exchanging important information. The everyday communication strategies that educators utilize when speaking with families about children's health and wellbeing help to create social support networks. "Support from families, friends and communities is associated with better health. Such social support networks could be very important in helping people solve problems and deal with adversity, as well as in maintaining a sense of mastery and control over life circumstances". (Public Health Agency of Canada, retrieved March 12, 2008).

Early childhood educators need to view themselves as health promoters, supporting children and families in healthy ways (Best Start Resource Centre, 2006). In addition, good early childhood practice is responsive to families' concerns, creating an environment of mutual respect. The educators take care not to abandon

important cultural values but to make adjustments when it seems reasonable, and recognize that collaborative relationships are key to effective decision making. An ongoing dialogue among parents, early childhood and health practitioners, can avoid the hysteria (e.g. fear of germs) that can result from one perspective that is not 'tempered' by other points of view. This dialogue is also more likely to lead to healthy policy at the agency level, and possibly advocacy at community levels and beyond, which can contribute to health improvements for greater numbers of children.

The sheer amount of information accessible through the internet, television and other media sources can be overwhelming and difficult to evaluate for reliability. Health literacy is an essential tool for early childhood educators and families. Parents and educators need to be aware of valuable and accessible resources and tools. Websites such as the following can be made known to parents and educators through communication tools such as parent or policy handbooks, or newsletters. Many if not most Canadian households now have Internet access. Among parents who were interviewed at a large Canadian paediatric emergency department, over 90% reported home Internet access and over 50% use the internet for health-related information (Goldman, 2006).

Credible health related websites include:

- Guiding parents in their search for high-quality health information on the Internet, www.cps.ca/english/statements/cp/practicepoint.htm (CPS, 2007),
- Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca
- CPS website for parents: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/

- CPS Well Beings website for health in child care: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/wellbeings/index.htm
- Safe Kids Canada: www.sickkids.ca/safekidscanada/
- Dieticians of Canada: Preschool Nutrition: www.dietitians.ca/healthystart/index.asp
- Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment: www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/english/

Communities and social capital

There is widespread recognition that socioeconomic status can affect child development profoundly. However, evidence is beginning to emerge that 'social capital', the power of socially cohesive communities, may act as a buffer against economic disadvantage for a variety of outcomes (Boyce & Keating, 2004). 'Social capital' benefits all its children and families, as communities support healthy practices by providing each other with emotional support and by helping to make a healthy choice the easier choice.

Children thrive within families and communities that meet their needs.

Their Future Is Now (Health Council of Canada, 2006, chapter 4), lists and describes several communities of all sizes that have organized with a vision for healthy children. Responding to the United Nations launch of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, a number of Canadian communities, led by municipal governments like the city of Greater Sudbury, or by non profit organizations like The Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia, have embarked on changes to the physical and social environments that promote health. Accessibility to safe pedestrian networks, free or low cost recreation, affordable healthy

food, and other responsive changes meet the stated needs of children and families. There are hundreds of programs across Canada that are working together as communities, often with common language, culture, or needs. Communities are not necessarily geographic, but have common goals which promote consistency and reduce stressors for children and families.

In summary, ongoing communication and socially cohesive communities are key to building the collaboration that serves to wade through the myriad of health related messages relentlessly coming at educators and families. It is empowering for all to create a consistent healthy agenda and practices for children and families. Ensuring access to credible information on a health issue supports informed decisions. Speaking to this issue, *Reaching for the Top* (Leitch 2007) recommends a network of collaboration via a National Office of Child and Youth Health with one of its mandates to generate, communicate and transfer best practices with respect to child health issues.

In addition, socially cohesive communities, whether educators and families in an early childhood setting, or broader communities that are working toward changes in physical and social environments, all contribute to the goal of healthy child development. Governments and their ministries need to take the lead in integrating their initiatives, delivering comprehensive services rather than separate, fragmented programs as well as sustaining successful programs.

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Connecting Children to Nature – Part I

“Beyond programs and legislation, our ultimate goal is deep cultural change, connecting children to nature, so that they can be healthier, happier and smarter.”

Cheryl Charles, Richard Louv, Lee Bodner, Bill Guns, *Children and Nature 2008 – A report on the movement to reconnect children to the natural world.*

While a worldwide movement to re-connect children to nature takes place at world forums, symposiums, conferences and governments, the people who are caring for children in early learning and child care have a unique opportunity to achieve this.

The focus pages will look at how nature affects children and how, for children, the world and nature are one and the same. We will take you on a walk through a forest preschool where children are outside all day in nature. You will learn how to start gardening with children in your care even with little or no space or equipment and all the year-round activities that can go with it. Explore what it is like to “live out loud” with Aboriginal children in Manitoba. And learn how sustainability and environmental stewardship is integrated into the ECE in Nature model that is growing in popularity in Europe and Canada.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART I

Healing the Wound

Reconnecting Children with Nature

by Peter Vogels

For children, the world and nature are one and the same

Recently, a friend of mine shared an interesting story about his grandson. Apparently his grandson had been out for a walk in the forest behind his home and upon his return happily announced, “I didn’t see any nature out there, but I did see a frog!” This wonderful comment captures the unique way that children experience the world. For children, the world and nature are one and the same; they cannot be divided.

Ample evidence, however, demonstrates that as children grow up, they lose this holistic perspective. A schism between children and nature develops, and they begin to see the more-than-human world as something “out there” apart and separate from themselves. Many see this “artificial divide” as the root cause of the environmental crisis. The more we alienate ourselves from the natural world, the greater the risk of abusing it.

Generally speaking, children’s access to the world of wild animals, forests, meadows, and rivers has been greatly diminished. In today’s world children’s circle of play is constricted to areas that are entirely human made. In this regard children encounter only environments that are simulated and artificial and that provide no access to any



other unique and different forms of life. Everywhere children look, they see the results of human enterprise. The sights, sounds, smells, and wild eyes of anything unique and different have been rendered silent.

The causes of this growing rift between children and nature vary. Adult caregivers have become reluctant to expose children to the world that exists beyond human influence. They are tentative because of the heightened concern of liability issues (real or imagined) that arise when children engage in nature-based activities. Adults also seem to be reluctant to engage with environments that are messy and difficult to predict and that they themselves are not familiar with. Computer and computer games have also become a substitute for playing outdoors, and it comes as no surprise that children can better identify and associate with computer icons than with the trees, birds, and insects that live in their neighborhood.

This widening gap between children and anything different from themselves can be understood as a wound, and the width



of this wound increases every day we deny children access to the natural world. It is deepened when children are not given the opportunity to engage the natural world in a meaningful way. The consequences of this wound are profound. Not only do children suffer emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, but society as a whole also suffers because we lose a vital source of our compassion, humility, and understanding that we are indeed deeply relational beings.

A brief history

Concerns related to this separation between children and nature have existed for a number of years. In the 1960s a number of child psychiatrists argued that children need to expand their bonds of attachment and identification beyond their immediate caregivers to the natural world as well.

Developing a relationship with animals, plants, trees, and so on helps children to understand the world as a home—a home that they share with other “kin.” This can relieve anxiety and fear and reduce the potential for adults to take out their deepest and most destructive impulses on a world that they often find strange and threatening.

In the 1970s outdoor educators became concerned about children’s growing inability to engage nature in a meaningful way. This concern spawned a movement built around the concept of *acclimatization*, which involves activities that help children to pay attention to the natural world. These activities encourage children to reengage this unfamiliar world through their senses. They touch, smell, and observe plants, trees, animals, and insects in ways that facilitate a long-lasting and sustainable relationship.

By the 1980s childhood development theorists began to point out the important role of the natural world in the development of healthy children. They challenged old theories that emphasized mastery over nature, and new theories that focus on the quality of the relationship between children and the environment emerged. These relational theories acknowledge that children’s internal ecology is a continuum of their external ecology. In this regard a relationship with a healthy, unpolluted natural environment plays an important role in the development of healthy children.

In the 1990s and during the turn of the 21st century, the idea of a human ecological identity began to emerge. Educators in particular began to explore the possibilities of a human

identity that includes not only ethnicity and culture, but also the natural world. If at an early age humans can identify deeply with nature, educators believe that a more inclusive and less rigid human identity can be formed. They argue that an identity associated with nature leads to a sense of self that can expand to include other beings. From this perspective it is difficult to destroy the natural world because our ecological identity would tell us that, indeed, we are destroying ourselves as well.

Consequences

It is difficult to determine why earlier concerns related to the growing divide between nature and children have gone unheeded. However, Richard Louv’s book *Last Child in the Woods* has once again brought these concerns to the forefront.

Louv clearly described the consequences of this growing gap between children and the natural world. He observed that children are now unable to engage the natural world in any meaningful way and described this inability to connect with nature as “nature-deficit disorder.” Louv identified many childhood diseases such as depression, attention deficit disorder, and hyperactivity as symptoms of nature-deficit disorder.

In addition to the impact on children, nature-deficit disorder has implications for society as a whole. As children have less and less access to green or untouched environments, the fear is that a form of environmental amnesia will settle into the general populace. We will lose any

recollection of a green and fecund world and begin to see our monotonous, repetitive, and lifeless landscapes as normal. This will make it difficult to instigate any action against depletion of the natural environment because we will have very little collective memory of what it is like to live in a green world, let alone come up with ideas on how to create one.

Living in a world inundated by human influence also curtails the growth of our moral imagination. If we engage only reproductions of ourselves, it is difficult not to feel that we are the only beings of value that exist in the world. In contrast, encountering a world filled with unique and different forms of life challenges us in a much more dynamic way. We are given the opportunity to be shocked by the differences and surprised by the similarities between ourselves and the plants and animals we encounter. In these experiences of

“It comes as no surprise that children can better identify and associate with computer icons than with the trees, birds, and insects that live in their neighborhood.”



difference and similarity, our moral imagination is born. In this space we are compelled to ask what our relationship with these other beings means and challenged to consider how we should treat them.

The consequences of our childhood separation from the natural world reverberate throughout our entire lives. The experience of loss and grief begins to emerge in adulthood. Our experience of loss occurs when we are walking through the forest and know that in many ways we are unable to relate to our surroundings. We sense some connection but cannot put words to the feelings that have been left behind in our childhood. Our grief is mitigated by the deep sadness we feel when we witness the relentless destruction of the natural environment and our feelings of helplessness associated with trying to decide what to do about it.

It is easy to feel powerless in the face of this grief, but it is important to point out that this grief is indeed an important sign. It suggests that somehow despite the deep wound between ourselves and the more-than-human world there is still a flicker of emotional and spiritual connection—enough to engage in the changes we need to make.

What can we do?

There is no doubt that adults play an important role in healing the wound that exists between children and nature. Perhaps adults need to begin by reflecting upon their own childhood experiences in nature and the meaning of these experiences for them. Our early experiences of wonder, revulsion, shock, awe, and surprise that occur so often in the natural environment can act as excellent resources. Drawing upon these early experiences can point the way to how we can help children build deep attachments with the birds, trees, and animals that they encounter.

Adults also need to curb their desire to use experiences in nature as a “teachable moment.” It is more important to



understand that the places children engage nature also represent an opportunity for conversation. It is a place where the world “cracks open” and reveals itself. These places of conversation represent opportunities to explore relationships between not only children and nature, but also children and adults. These conversations require that we engage the world in an entirely different way. We are called upon to live with the question “What does this all mean?” rather than revert to the static, pat answers that we so often rely upon.

Our relationship with the natural world is an embodied experience heightened through our senses of smell, touch, and sight and our kinesthetic sensibilities. When children run freely through an open

field, smell the aroma of a wild rose, or witness the wind bristling through the branches of a tree, the world comes *through* them as one coherent phenomenon. When they experience the world in this way, it cannot be divided into artificial parts. They experience the world as a relational whole in which the possibilities associated with being human become limitless. Certainly this is a gift we can consider offering our children.

Adults can advocate for the vital role of nature experiences in childhood development and encourage program developers and policy makers to consider this in their planning. Part of their argument can include the notion that engaging children with the natural world is important for their psychological, emotional, and spiritual development. However, their argument must also include the idea that reconnecting children with nature is vital to the general health of our society. When we all feel an emotional, psychological, and spiritual attachment to nature, our capacity to address the social-ecological crisis we face today improves. Let the healing begin!

Peter Vogels, PhD, RSW is an instructor in the social work program at MacEwan College in Edmonton, Alberta. He has a lifelong interest in the human-nature connection. Throughout his career Peter has worked with children in a wide variety of outdoor settings. His most recent research project explored the concept of ecological identity and its development. Peter can be reached at vogelsp@macewan.ca.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART I

Outdoors, All Day

Walk Through a Forest Preschool

Claire McLaughlin

Like most preschools, the children at the Carp Ridge Forest Preschool follow a typical day that begins with circle time in the morning, lunch at noon, creative and physical activities throughout the day and a nap in the afternoon. But unlike most preschools, these children do these things **outdoors** the whole day.

All year round, rain or shine, winter or summer, the children are basking in nature, breathing fresh air, learning about the environment and having fun just exploring. In extreme weather, such as electrical storms, blizzards or temperatures below -10C, they take things indoors at an on site facility – a heated schoolhouse cabin with kitchen and bathroom, plus the standard art supplies, musical instruments, books and tables.

Other than that, pine cones and sticks replace plastic toys and dolls. Trees, hills and rocks make up their playground structure. Nap time might take place in a Yurt, but story time,

snacks and drawing easily take place on a bed of leaves or on a blanket of snow. Hiking, gardening, and learning about tree bark and insects are routine. The preschool is located on 190 acres of forest, walking trails, marsh and open field, in Carp just outside Ottawa, Ontario.

For Marlene Power-Johnston, who heads the 3-6 preschool, the greatest challenge is stemming the fears of parents. “A lot of it is about educating the parents.” Power-Johnston holds seminars for parents on how to dress their children appropriately for all types of weather conditions. She also provides ample resources on positive outcomes of children in forest preschools that operate all over Europe. She is quick to cite reports and studies that show how children in forest preschools are sick 25 fewer days per year than those in traditional child cares, due in part to not being indoors where germs are easily spread. She further points to the increase in childhood obesity and early childhood mental illnesses, ADHD and anxieties as being directly linked to children living in an indoor society.

When Power-Johnston’s daughter was born a few years ago, she felt limited by the lack of creativity and natural play space she found in the more conventional child cares available. Formerly a social worker and a child care supervisor of a more mainstream child care, she brought this experience and a passion for the environment to create the first forest preschool in Canada. When asked what she looks for most when staffing educators for her program, she says, “beyond the ECE training, they must love children, have a passion for the environment and believe in the fundamental importance of connecting children to nature.”

Snapshot of Carp Ridge:

- 10 spaces for students aged 3 to 6
- 2 ECE facilitators
- Child-centered approach
- Food supplied by local organic grower
- Parent days on occasional weekends
- Activities include building forts, hiking, yoga, observing and identifying plants and birds, nature crafts, storytelling and music
- For more information visit www.carpridgelearningcentre.ca

Note: While forest preschools and outdoor kindergartens have gained popularity in Europe over the past few decades particularly in the Nordic countries and Britain and Germany, the concept is fairly new to Canada. In many Canadian provinces, such outdoor and nature-based child care centres can face many challenges in meeting provincial licensing requirements. Many of the health and safety regulations are not always compatible with alternative programs like these. Meanwhile, the issue of including sustainability and environmental stewardship into ECE policy is beginning due to the green movement.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART I

A Perfect, Finished Product

By Marc Battle

“We are here to live out loud.”

— Émile Zola

What I experienced with Jenny that day will haunt me for the rest of my life.

At the Headstart in Skidegate BC, Jenny wanted the children to experience something that she loved to do when she was a child – to fish for minnows in her Nuni’s creek using nothing but worms tied to a blade of grass.

We all started off the day practicing how to tie blades of grass to slimy worms with every adult and child squealing and squirming. Once this was finished we went down to the creek with our worms on little grass leashes.

Jenny was the first one in and dangled the worm in the water and then snapped her hand up fast once there was a nibble and the minnow landed gently in the moss on the bank. Everyone cheered and then one by one the children and adults were seductively dangling their worms and carefully tossing minnows onto the bank and then releasing them back into the creek again. We were all smiling, but lost in something so silent that nobody talked and everything around us was just a blur. Sometimes Jenny or Chini would quietly add some stories from their childhood or point out which plant could be used to settle your stomach.

After we felt finished, Jenny took us to the Headstart van parked by the shore. She opened up the back and brought



Today, we are rich in child development knowledge, yet I hardly see a child outside. Maybe this is why we value giving our children such plastic toy lives. Nature is uncontrollable and unpredictable, it is continually developing and is never the same, but plastic is a perfect, finished product. Perhaps it just reflects our image of children today.

— Marc Battle

out a tray of salmon skins left over from the canning activity they did yesterday. We followed her and the skins to the edge of the land, high above the beach. Each of us threw a salmon skin onto the beach below. When we were finished, the eagles descended from the cedars and swooped down between us striking the skins with their talons swinging far ahead of them.



Soon the beach was swamped with eagles, ravens and seagulls and as quickly as it started it was over. Someone suggested that it would be a good idea to hit the burger place for some ice cream and we all agreed.

Once back at the Headstart, everyone sat down for circle. The kids were dressed in their regalia of button blankets bearing their family clans of whale, eagle and raven and sang Haida songs about being together. And it all ended with a boy dancing an eagle dance all on his own.

I think about my day with Jenny and my mind wanders off to when I was a boy in Ajax, Ontario. It was 1973 and my dad had just cut down a large, bug infested Weeping Willow in our backyard. The whole backyard was a complete mess of golden branches twisted together in a heap six feet high.

My dad said that he wouldn't start cutting it up for a week and that we could play in it if we liked. This made it impossible for us to sleep that night. And I do recall some threats from him of losing that opportunity due to the random bouts of excited screaming from us throughout the night.

The sun had barely awoken when we were in that damp tangled mass of limb, leaf and aphids in the backyard and stayed there all day long. Our friends dropped by every now and then, but we never left. We stayed behind to invent dangerous adventures, defy the odds, be the hero, make shelters and test our physical strength. We would read comic books in our tree fort as we ate sandwiches on willow beds. We sang bawdy songs like "Shaving Cream" and invented a couple of our own based upon the common melodies of the day. We really lived out loud.



It's funny, but I have made it my life's work to provide children with the same access to nature and adventure that I had that summer of 1973. Whether it was in Toronto or her bedroom communities – on the rugged coast of the north coast of BC or the flatlands of Manitoba, I wanted kids to feel the way I did back then and how Jenny made me feel today.

As a result, I have led preschool children into bogs that we thought were frozen – only to return to daycare with cold, soaking wet feet and stories of bravado and machismo. I have spent weeks with daycare kids encamped in the woods behind our \$100 000 playground – building forts and rafts, making fires to cook our food and digging holes to bury our waste.

When we couldn't get outside we would bring nature inside – at one point removing most of those trouble-making toys and replacing them with sticks, stones, logs and other loose parts that seemed to make sense. We would even bring the daycare out to nature and stuff our backpacks with books, blankets, dolls, and paint, paper and brushes for those Emily Carr moments.

I have seen children completely transformed from their experiences with nature. I remember a young boy who never got into trouble and was overly cautious and conservative in everything that he did. One day, the other boys had built a large climbing wall out of drift logs that we collected from the shore. After they tried out their marvelous wall, the boy mustered up the courage to climb it. It took a few tries and a couple of tense moments but he made it to the top with a face that beamed something words could never capture. And I swear he started to swagger that day. Luckily, I caught it all

With each pass of the eagles, we could feel the wind of their wings brush our cheeks as we silently stared in awe and disbelief. For that moment we were all experiencing something meaningful and magical at exactly the same time and is what we will have in common for the rest of our lives.



The most meaningful and memorable experiences I have had in my own life and have witnessed with children have all been grounded in the natural world.

on film and showed his mom when she arrived to pick him up. “My boy is a man,” she cried. “I was worried that he would never take a risk or be brave,” she said. He really lived out loud.

Jean Piaget (French psychologist, naturalist and child development theorist) thought that we constructed knowledge and understanding from our interactions with the environment. The interactions that are more meaningful and memorable to us are the ones we pay more attention to. Therefore if you want to understand and know more, you better have more meaningful interactions. And this brings me to my point about connecting children to nature. The most meaningful and memorable experiences I have had in my own life and have witnessed with children have all been grounded in the natural world. Why? I think because nature accommodates all the skills and abilities of whoever interacts with it – there is no right way or wrong way – there is always something new or unique to discover as it is continually changing. And there are moments of great peace and tranquility that give us plenty of time to think about what we have discovered. And probably most importantly, we know what to do with nature. It is familiar to us, it is our strength and everything great in life is built upon our strengths and never upon our needs.

So let’s all live out loud and find the simplest ways to bring children and nature together. Whether it is spending as much time outside as you can, planting a garden with kids or putting a pile of sticks in your block area. Every small act will ring like church bells and start a fervor that you can’t help but to go along with.

As I reflect upon my day with Jenny and my time with children, I think about how weird and a little unsettling it is that I am contributing to a special issue on nature for early childhood educators. Shouldn’t this topic be as common in our field as separation anxiety, temper tantrums and carnivorous toddlers? And yet we seem to be spending more time indoors with more plastic toys and very little contact with the natural world. It is not that we have become bad guardians of our young, we just found ourselves hooked on a nasty habit and routine.

But what if there were a more sinister plot at play here. Maybe deep down inside, our children’s unbridled potential terrifies us. This could be why researchers spend so much time studying them in great depth and magnitude and why we eat up their findings like candy. It is less scary if we see children only as cognitive systems that with the proper influence will turn out how we expect them to. We believe this knowledge will drive away our fear of the unknown. My father knew nothing about milestones, synaptic pruning or firing neurons and we spent a lot of time outside, mucking about with nature.

Today, we are rich in child development knowledge, yet I hardly see a child outside. Maybe this is why we value giving our children such plastic toy lives. Nature is uncontrollable and unpredictable, it is continually developing and is never the same, but plastic is a perfect, finished product. Perhaps it just reflects our image of children today.

This is dedicated to Judy Guay who encouraged me to live out loud when I first started in this field. Marc Battle teaches ECE at Red River College in Winnipeg. Marc has lived his life so loud that he once fronted a heavy metal band in the early 80’s.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART I

Forest Preschools: ECE in the Natural World

Learning through Experience, Play and Environmental Stewardship

by **Marlene Power Johnston**



As globalization and industrialization have shaped the Western world we have seen a rise in consumerism, mass wealth within the hands of a few, and greater material acquisition. At the same time, we have witnessed rising gaps between the rich and poor, human rights issues abound, gender and racial inequalities persist within all sectors of our society, and a depletion of our world's most precious resources. A time has come for all to rethink the values which are shaping our institutions, our families and our individual daily lives. We need to ask whether these values and societal beliefs are serving humanity from a local and global perspective.

Throughout the world, we have seen a growing number of parents, educators, community members and academics acknowledge the need for such a shift especially in the area of Early Childhood Education. According to the UNESCO Report, "The Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a Sustainable Society," many people are now recognizing the need to lead the sustainability movement with our youngest learner's given the fact that the early formative years are integral to the learning of values, attitudes, behaviours and skills that will follow them into adulthood. One exemplary approach to sustainable education for early learners is demonstrated through the development and growth of Forest Preschools throughout the globe.

The origins of Forest Preschools, or "Wood Kindergartens" began in Denmark in the 1950's by a woman named Ella Flatau. After spending time in a nearby forest with her own and neighbouring children, she gradually gained interest in utilizing this as a more formalized preschool option. With support from local families, the first Wood Kindergarten was established and has since spread rampantly to other Scandinavian countries, the UK, parts of the United States and now Canada. Currently, there are over 450 Wood Kindergartens in Germany where state subsidies exist to support and make accessible this alternative preschool option (Wikipedia, retrieved 2008).

This Early Childhood Education Model is rooted in the outdoors, where children spend the majority of their time playing, exploring and learning in the natural world. Often, particularly in colder climates, there is an indoor shelter on site or a large heated tent that is used for extreme weather conditions such as electrical storms, snow storms, temperatures below -10C, or temporary moments of reprieve from the outdoor elements. These shelters often house art supplies, musical instruments, outdoor equipment, and the food for the day's program.

Although variances exist between climatic context and program, there are several fundamental educational themes



that can be found in all Forest Preschool Programs across the globe. Within each program one will find an emphasis placed on outdoor, environmental, play-based, experiential, and holistic learning methods. Additionally, the toys, art supplies, and play structures are predominantly formed by objects found in nature and often built by the children and educators themselves. An emphasis is placed on child centred learning; allowing the children to explore, plan daily activities and create toys or games from the objects they find in nature.

The objectives of this learning process are to empower children, instil an intrinsic drive and passion for learning, and to allow children to authentically engage with their environments and the people in them. This Early Childhood Education approach is closely linked to Friedrich Froebel's original intentions when he founded the first "Kindergarten" in 1837. This "children's garden" was an educational setting where children could interact with the natural world and be led by their own interests and desires to explore. Lastly, in both the Forest Preschool as well as the first Kindergarten the teacher was intended to play the role of guide rather than lecturer.

Within the Howe of Fife, Scotland, there exists a Forest Kindergarten called the Secret Garden that perfectly highlights the learning model described above. After working in Norway and witnessing the benefits of other Forest Preschools, Cathy Bache decided to open up a Forest Preschool to meet the needs of families in her own community. This school has been open since 2007 and has been gaining momentum with parents interest, children's enrolment, press interest and private donations from renowned outdoor suppliers like 'Hunters' Wellie boots. Within this Forest Preschool children are not following traditional lesson plans nor are their learning goals prescribed in any way. Within the woods, children decide their daily activities and explore the multitude of gifts that nature provides. According to Cathy, rather than learning

the difference between a circle and a square, they are learning to identify local flora and fauna.

According to Secret Garden's administrative staff, Morven Cuthbertson, the predominant questions that parents bring to the school, fall into two categories; "Where does my child use the bathroom" and "What happens in the rain?" The simple answer to this, is they learn to use the bathroom outdoors or use the portable bio-toilet they have on site, and they simply dress in water-proof gear to stay warm and dry. Morven also stated that most families they meet these days are enthusiastic about this model of early childhood education so they don't actually encounter many fears or barriers on a regular basis, (M. Cuthbertson, personal communication, January 19, 2009).

This parental enthusiasm is possibly the outcome of larger global issues that are impacting children today such as childhood obesity, an increase in childhood illness, as well as an increase in childhood mental illness. (Honore, 2008). Many parents and proponents of Forest Kindergartens believe that children can greatly benefit from such programs on a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual level. Although longitudinal research is still lacking in this area, such preschools currently in operation report children having fewer sick days per year through better air quality and improved physical agility. Such schools also report decreased chances of experiencing childhood obesity due to the high level of outdoor activity. Furthermore, many children who have been diagnosed within traditional school settings as having ADHD/ADD have flourished within outdoor settings given the decrease in noise level, natural lighting, slower transition times, and an environment that generally has lower child to adult ratios. This allows for a greater focus on each individual, less overstimulation, and fewer physical boundaries restricting their need to move and explore.

Children's emotional well-being is also reported to be greatly increased within this setting given the community and family involvement, the emphasis that often goes into alternative discipline practices, and fewer outbursts displayed by children when they are given freedom rather than a multitude of restrictions. Lastly, spirit comes into play within this setting as children are introduced to and form relationships with the natural world. As their teachers display a sense of awe, wonder and appreciation for nature, they too gain this appreciation for all living things on the earth.

Barriers to accessing the natural world

Currently within Canada we are faced with several barriers that must be addressed in order to increase children's access to, and appreciation for the natural world. The Children and Nature



Network established in the US was formed out of the recognition that we currently live in a risk-adverse and indoor culture. This network has been propelling a movement of parents, educators, policy makers, and governments who recognize the need for all children to have greater access to the outdoors and sustainable education. As this movement takes shape we only hope that more people will come to understand the current state of childhood in Canada, the negative impacts of being a risk-adverse and indoor culture, and the implications of breeding future generations that are estranged from the environment in which they will soon be entrusted to protect.

What can we do?

There are several things parents and educators can do within their own families and educational settings to promote children's awareness and appreciation for the natural world. Nature-based early childhood education can take place on a city street as an educator takes the time to listen to the birds, point out weather patterns, or research local plants and wildlife in your area. Take the time with children to build mini shelters, design a simple birdhouse, plant a garden in a tiny alcove of the playground, and create outdoor plays on taking care of the earth. Start a recycling and composting program, encourage your cooks to buy local produce and involve the children in seeking a local farmer to source fruits, vegetables, milk and cheese. Start a nature hike around the neighbourhood weekly; get children walking and observing nature, then draw or journal what they've seen. Aside from the multitude of daily activities you can incorporate into your week, a vital component to introducing the natural world through a magical lens is to introduce a concept or provide an opportunity and then **get out of the way** so children can discover it their own way.

Other ways to incorporate sustainable, nature-based education into traditional preschool settings:

- Hold a meeting with parents and educators to discuss "How to dress your child for the outdoors in a variety of weather conditions" and invite someone to speak from the local outdoor store
- Include longer transition times during colder seasons to make the time for children and educators to get outdoor gear on without getting frustrated
- Have a meeting with staff to discuss areas they are passionate about, project ideas, areas of frustration within the school, how to come together and start a small, achievable project
- Have a meeting with the children and do the same (get them to come up with project ideas)
- Research topics such as water consumption, garbage removal, food waste, recycling, human rights, playground greening, gardening, etc with children.



- Start a composting program, use compost for growing a vegetable garden (can lead to food access, poverty, etc).
- Build temporary shelters on the school ground, get families involved and then take a nap one day in shelter
- Use green cleaning supplies (get children to research what is used, how to make natural cleaner's, and then see how you can make shifts in this area)
- Sing nature-based songs (identify weather patterns, animal songs, food songs, etc)
- Find teaching opportunities in what is often perceived as "bad weather." For example, find miniature rivers and follow them through the school yard, test water absorption on different surfaces, fill a rain barrel with rainwater and water plants, build snow-people or paint on the snow, etc
- Develop your own appreciation for nature and children will begin viewing their environments from this light

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CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART I

Organic Gardening in the Child Care Setting

by Karen Eilersen

Four children are hopping around the dramatic play centre in their classroom pretending to be bunnies. Aaron stops hopping and in a very loud voice exclaims “Oh no, guys! The bugs are eating our carrots!” Connor hops over and says, “Quick, let’s get some lady bugs”. Children and organic gardening are a great combination. They get to dig in the dirt, be physical and witness the fascinating and ever-changing life cycles of nature. At the same time, they learn all about insects, both the beneficial and the harmful ones, they try new foods and develop a strong appreciation of the environment. They connect directly with nature.

Gardening can be a wonderful addition to your curriculum for both you and the children. Explore, experiment and learn together. No previous experience necessary. Your enthusiasm and sense of awe can be contagious to the children in your program (and maybe to other teachers too!). And you can start right now in your classroom, with very little equipment or expense. Since you won’t need to buy costly pesticides and chemical fertilizers when you garden organically, you not only teach the children about respecting the environment but you save money too! And it’s safe to do with children of all ages and abilities.

About 10 years ago, we had our first garden at the back of the daycare playground in an open field. We had built four raised beds and planted a variety of different fruits and vegetables in them. We visited the garden almost every day to tend and



**Over the years, the children
have donated hundreds
of pounds of fresh organic
produce for people in need
in our community!**

view the fruits of our labour. One day in late August, we went out to pick the corn that we had been growing and discovered to our horror that, while the corn stalks were still there, all the corn cobs were gone and some of the stalks were broken! What happened? Where did all our corn go? We started to investigate around the garden and then one child found prints in the soil. DEER HOOVES in our garden! There was an explosion of excitement. The deer had eaten our corn! At first, the children



were quite mad that the deer took all their corn and didn't leave us any. This sparked a project about deer, including learning about their habitat and the food they eat. We discussed how cities grew and how animals end up getting displaced. We even started talking about sustainable development (although we didn't call it that at the time). In the end, the children came to the conclusion that the deer needed the corn more than they did and it was all right to share with them.

Our organic gardening program also provides us the opportunity to teach empathy and community awareness to the children. Each year, they tend to their garden and in August, we have a big harvest. After everything is picked, the children decide what they are going to take home to their family, what they will give to the daycare cook (for lunch and snacks), what they are going to taste right in the garden or keep for classroom cooking activities. The big



Here's an interesting activity you can try right now with children.

You will need: a few Ziploc bags, various seeds, paper towel

Moisten a sheet of paper towel (not dripping), put one or two seeds on it and fold it over once. Put the paper towel with the seeds in the Ziploc bag and close it. Repeat this with the other seeds and bags. Tape your bags to a sunny window and watch what happens! In a few days or weeks (depending on the type of seeds) you can see them sprout. You can then transplant these sprouts directly into the garden after the last expected frost date for your area. (You can find this online by doing a search for your area)

Organic Gardening can be successfully incorporated into all areas of your curriculum:

MATH: sorting, classifying, measuring, and counting;

SCIENCE/DISCOVERY: planning, estimating, cooking, beneficial insects, composting, companion planting;

MOTOR SKILLS: handling seeds, digging, pulling weeds, and carrying watering cans;

LANGUAGE/LITERACY: reading seed packets, documenting in garden planners, and documentation in classroom for children and parents;

CREATIVE: collage with seeds or seed catalogues, sketching in the garden;

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL: team work, problem solving, and group projects, empathy

You don't need to be an expert to garden with children. Most seed packets have simple instructions on them. There are many how-to books and magazines available at your local library or bookstore and there are literally hundreds of web sites devoted to gardening and organic gardening. My favourites right now are www.organicgardening.com and www.schoolgardenwizard.org. Try new things and experiment. If something doesn't grow, or gets eaten by your local wildlife (raccoons and bunnies!), consider it a learning opportunity for you and the children and try something different next time.

You really can't go wrong.



event every year is the children's food bank donation. Some years we take a field trip to the food bank to make the donation (including a tour of the facility...walking in the BIG fridge is the highlight!) Other years, the food bank truck comes to the centre for pick up.

Organic gardening is a year round

activity: Seed starting, seedling care, garden preparation, seedling planting, tending, harvesting, cooking, sampling, donating, preparing beds for winter, winter investigating, and spring renewal. In one of our kindergarten classrooms, we have "grow lights" so we can grow year round. We had a shelving unit built for us with florescent lighting attached. This is where we grow our seedlings until they are ready to plant outside.

Seed packets are fairly inexpensive and it's much cheaper (and a lot more fun for the kids) to grow from seeds than it is to buy seedlings from your local nursery. You will also find a much wider variety of fruits and vegetables if you grow from seeds. We also use rain barrels to help teach water conservation; and composters (both in the garden and vermi-composters in the classroom) to teach children environmentally friendly waste



management and ways to make healthy fertilizer for their garden.

You don't need a lot of space for your garden. We are very lucky to have a large area for gardens with raised beds at two of our locations, but our two others have shared concrete school playgrounds. Size really doesn't matter! A small patch of land or a few clay pots will do. Most fruits and vegetables need to be planted in a sunny spot with at least 8-12 hours of sun per day. You can even do all your growing indoors under grow lights if you can't find a spot outside.

Radishes grow very quickly and the children can see results in the first week. Carrots are a lot of fun to grow and especially to pick. The children will get a real surprise as they pull the green tops out of the soil and find long orange carrots underneath (you can even get purple carrots now)! Last spring a group of our kindergarten children were cleaning up their garden in preparation for planting when we found a surprise. A whole row of carrots that we hadn't picked the fall before! The children were so excited about the "treasure" that they had found. After picking them, the children had to go around the centre and show all the other children and teachers what they had found. We had carrot salad with our lunch that day...yum!

Children's gardens are a wonderful, creative opportunity for children to experiment, smell, touch, taste, plant, grow, nurture, observe and move. Give it a try this year. You'll be amazed at how much you and the children will enjoy it!

Karen Eilersen ECE is the founder and director of Discovery Licensed Child Care Programs located in Barrie, Ontario (founded in 1997). Discovery has won numerous environmental awards including Bell Canada Business Green Award in 2003 & 2007 and Environmental Action Barrie awards for Environmental Programming with Children, and Operating an Environmentally Facility.





RESEARCH UPDATES

Program Evaluation

The Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre (ECLKC) reviewed Canadian programs for improving early childhood learning and development that have been or are being well evaluated in efficacy, effectiveness or dissemination studies. This issue of *ECLKC Bulletin* highlights four such programs and some of their strengths and limitations. The first two assess the effectiveness of nurse home visitation on young mothers, and the next two evaluate the effects of short-term parent training programs on the behaviour and attitudes of parents as well as their young children.



To read *ECLKC Bulletin*: http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/ECLKC/bulletin/ECLKCVol4-1_EN.pdf

Canadian Report Sounds Alarm on Children's Physical Activity

A 2008 report card issued by Active Healthy Kids Canada issued a D in physical activity. According to the findings, 90 per cent of Canadian children are not meeting the current physical activity guidelines. The data used to issue the grade came from a survey conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyles Research Institute (CFLRI). The report attributes the problem to too much screen time, both television and computer, and also acknowledges societal and parental barriers to getting children outside. The Report Card is designed to provide knowledge and insight that will help build better programs and policies, while measuring Canada's improvement from year to year. To read the full report visit the Healthy Active Kids Canada web site at: www.activehealthykids.ca



The Value of Outdoor Play

The following is an excerpt of an article that was first published as part of the Canadian Council on Learning's series called Lessons in Learning. The article entitled "Let the Children Play: Nature's Answer to Early Learning" was prepared by the Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre and is available in full online at www.ccl-cca.ca/childhoodlearning.



Nature has a positive impact on children's physical and mental well-being. Parents and early educators must design outdoor play environments with the same care and attention paid to indoor environments.

Natural landscapes in the outdoors typically provide

- rich, diverse, multi-sensory experiences;
- opportunities for noisy, boisterous, vigorous, physically active play;
- opportunities for physical challenge and risktaking that are inherent in the value of play;
- rough, uneven surfaces, with opportunities for the development of physical strength, balance, and coordination; and
- natural elements and loose parts that children can combine, manipulate, and adapt for their own purposes.



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ACROSS CANADA AND BEYOND

International

On February 13, after much debate, both the House of Representatives and Senate gave final approval to an economic recovery package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The bill includes \$2 billion for child care assistance to low-income families, which will help provide child care services for hundreds of thousands of children while their parents go to work. The Act includes \$2.1 billion for Head Start as well as other funding aimed at early childhood programs in the Department of Defense, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind programs. President Obama signed the legislation into law on February 17th.

In Australia, Kindergarten numbers are hitting levels unseen for a generation as cash-strapped parents seek relief from high child-care fees. The collapse of ABC Learning and a baby boom that began in 2004 are adding to the kindergarten crush. Enrolments are at a 20-year high at Sydney's Catholic schools. State schools are still finalizing their enrolment details but kindergarten numbers are expected to match or exceed last year's record high.

The state president of Early Childhood Australia, Leonie Arthur, said some parents were saving cash by withdrawing their children early from child care and opting for school, bucking a trend towards holding them back until they turned six.

National

On Jan. 27, 2009, the federal government introduced a budget that provided a \$40 billion stimulus to the economy, but nothing new for child care. There was stimulus spending for infrastructure, tax cuts for individuals and corporations and more money for Employment Insurance benefits and retraining.

According to a Stats Canada, in 2008, the cost of daycare has risen much more than the overall rate of inflation. The Consumer Price Index rose by 2.3 per cent over 2007. The average cost of daycare across the country was up by 6.1 per cent.

As part of Canada's Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), the new labour mobility provisions require that, effective April 1, 2009, people with a specific professional or occupational certification in one province

or territory will be recognized as qualified to practise their profession in all provinces and territories where their profession or occupation is regulated. The agreement was approved by the Committee on Internal Trade (CIT) in December 2008, which is made up of federal, provincial and territorial internal trade ministers.

Alberta

The new Child Care Licensing Regulation for Alberta came into effect when the *Child Care Licensing Act* was proclaimed on November 1, 2008. The regulation reflects input gathered during two extensive rounds of consultations with Albertans. All staff working in licensed child care programs will require certification from Alberta Children and Youth Services Child Care Staff Certification Office. The new Act was put into place to ensure safety, create more child care choices for families by licensing new types of child care programs, and streamline the administration of licensing. The act outlines the requirements for applying for and receiving a licence, describes enforcement actions for noncompliance, and explains how licence holders can appeal an enforcement action. The regulation describes the program and staff requirements for all licensed child care programs.

British Columbia

Education Minister Shirley Bond announced in February 2009 that full-day kindergarten in B.C. will not begin in September as predicted, but rather will have to be phased in gradually. The possibility of full-day kindergarten was raised in a throne speech by the government in February 2008 offering full-day kindergarten to all five-year-olds. The Early Childhood Learning Agency was formed to do a comprehensive study of the issue and is still finalizing a report that was slated for completion at the end of 2008. The government has reported that the transition would require an estimated 1,000 new teachers, and that all-day kindergarten and proposed programs for three- and four-year-olds would cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Manitoba

On November 24, 2008 the Government of Manitoba announced the funding of 2,350 child care spaces and unveiled

their Workforce Stability Strategy. With the goal of meeting 6,500 child care spaces under the Family Choices: Manitoba's Five Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care strategy, the province has identified 10 schools that have surplus space that can be modified for child-care centres, developing 343 spaces at a cost of \$1.5 million. These are the first of up to 35 new program sites committed to under Family Choices. Of the newly funded spaces, 1,077 are also newly created spaces and further included 100 nursery school spaces to improve access for low-income families with children attending nursery school.

To support the new spaces, Manitoba has also launched measures to bolster recruitment and retention of child care workers. This includes wage increases of up to 20 per cent over five years, establishing a minimum base wage for Early Childhood Educators to at least \$15.50 per hour and Child Care Assistants in training to at least \$12.25 per hour, increasing the annual training grant, expanding the workplace training model, and ECE training programs in the communities, providing apprenticeship and scholarship funds.

New Brunswick

During the months of November and December 2008, approximately 50% of New Brunswick's licensed child care centers were invited to take part in a consultation and questionnaire intended to collect information towards the pursuit of achieving pay equity for Child Care Staff who work in New Brunswick Government approved child day care facilities.

North West Territories

The Children First Society released a survey study in December, 2008 that shows there is a demand for more child care and facilities and programs in Inuvik. Researchers report that 16 per cent of company managers and business owners are forced to change hours of service to accommodate the needs of their employees with children. Altering business hours in itself is significant for any employer but the challenge is to find a building, or funds to build one to house a child care facility. Negotiations are underway to access Community Capacity Building Fund money, but for now parents and volunteers must get support from local businesses and sponsors to keep the project proposal alive.



Ontario

In Ontario, Some 22,000 child care spaces may be cut due to the elimination of \$63.5 million in federal funding from Ottawa. The federal childcare money was first handed out by former Prime Minister Paul Martin and then continued temporarily by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. As many as 15,000 subsidized spaces are threatened, 6,000 in Toronto alone — because of the Conservative Government's cuts. The cuts could start this fall — and thousands of spaces could be eliminated in other parts of the province as well. These cuts will hit the low-income families in the province who depend on subsidized spaces in order to work.

PEI

The Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) has developed a new vision to allow Islanders and decision-makers to see more clearly why proper early learning is so important for children. Consultations with the Public Kindergarten Commissioner, Pam Mella are underway in the province to bring kindergarten into the public school system. The ECDA urges the province, to work in collaboration with all stakeholders, to develop and implement a comprehensive, universal early childhood education system for PEI.

In October 2008, the association launched a five-year plan to promote affordable access to sustainable, high quality early childhood education.

Quebec

Close to half of Quebec's 14,000 home based child care workers, 1,200 of them in Montreal, have joined one of the province's biggest unions since getting the green light to organize in the fall. The Centrale des Syndicats du Québec is preparing to lay the groundwork for a historic first contract with the government. Pensions, pay equity, workers' compensation, certification, wage benefits and other human resource logistics will have to be done to ratify a first contract for home-based child care workers who will now be on par with workers in the province's government run \$7-a-day child care centres. Home based child care workers here were formerly considered self-employed.

CALENDAR

APRIL

27-29

Ottawa, Ontario

TOWARDS 2020: Canada's Commitment to Children & Youth

Conference hosted by Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa. Information www.towards2020.ca

MAY

13-15

Sackville, New Brunswick

Putting Science into Action: Equity from the Start Through Early Child Development

National conference hosted by the Council for Early Child Development. Information: www.councilecd.ca

21-23

Richmond, BC

ECEBC's 38th annual conference "Leadership: Innovation and Inspiration"

Information: www.ecebc.ca

25-31

National

Safe Kids Week 2009

This year's 13th annual Safe Kids Week is focusing on home product safety. Register to receive more information on the home product safety campaign and how to get your child care group/organization involved by visiting: www.safekidscanada.ca

28-30

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Where the Rivers Meet: Raising the Level in Early Childhood Education

Annual national conference co-hosted by the Manitoba Child Care Association and the Canadian Child Care Federation. For information: www.mccahouse.org/conference.htm

JUNE

12-13

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

Engaging Creative Minds! Child Care Conference and Trade Show 2009

Conference Presented by the Centre provincial de ressources prescolaires, Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of NS, Child Care Connection NS and Nova Scotia Child Care Association. For information: www.cccns.org

16-19

Belfast, Northern Ireland

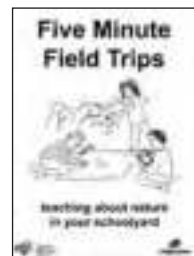
World Forum on Early Care and Education 2009

Hosted by the World Forum Foundation the 2009 World Forum will mark the 10th Anniversary of the international organization. For information: www.worldforumfoundation.org

RESOURCES

Five Minute Field Trips – teaching about nature in your schoolyard

This free 47 page online printout is produced by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Global Environmental & Outdoor



Education Council. Written by two teachers in children's environmental education, the pages are filled with illustrations and simple games that can be adapted to the age and group of the children to heighten their sense of wonder in the outdoors. Observation games, awareness games, action ideas such as tree planting projects and resources on environmental education fill the manual. The activities in the manual have been grouped into three sections: Awareness, Understanding and Action to sequence the activities into a natural flow for learning about the natural world. Available online at: <http://www.geoec.org/lessons/5min-fieldtrips.pdf>

I Love Dirt!

The book I love Dirt presents 52 open-ended activities to help you engage children in the outdoors. No matter what the location,



from a patch of grass in the city to the wide open meadows of the country to a bog in a swamp – each activity is meant to promote exploration and stimulate imagination. Jennifer Ward is the author of many books that present nature to children. The book can be purchased through Amazon at \$10. Learn more about the author and this and her other books at: jenniferwardbooks.com