

# Interaction

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 2, FALL 2009

## Connecting Children to Nature – Part 2 **Greening Child Care**

**Aniingngualaurtaa – Let's Play  
Outside – Nunavik**

**ECE Retention – Is it All About  
the Money?**



NATIONAL  
**Child  
Day**  
November 20th



PUBLICATION OF THE CANADIAN CHILD CARE FEDERATION

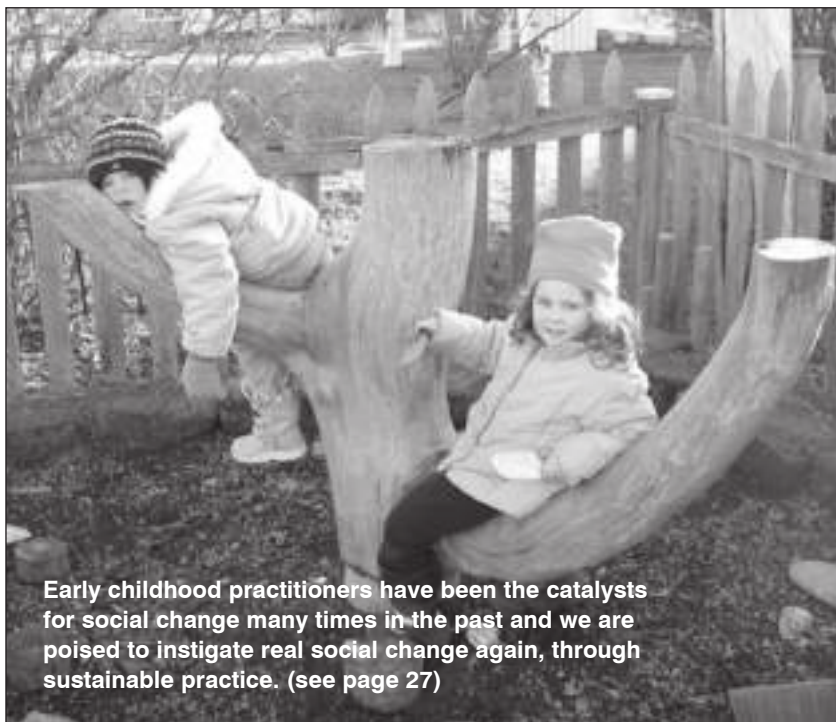


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Early childhood practitioners have been the catalysts for social change many times in the past and we are poised to instigate real social change again, through sustainable practice. (see page 27)

## Connecting Children to Nature – part 2 – Greening Child Care

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**#37** – *National Child Day*

**#94** – *Building a Foundation for Numeracy*



The photo on the front cover was taken by Mary Caroline Rowan in Inukjuak, Northern village of Nunavik, Northern Quebec.

# Behind the Scenes

In the midst of an economic downturn in Canada, it may seem like a tall order to construct a new back yard play space or create new programs to get children outside, but in fact it can cost little to nothing and will generate new rich learning activities for children during the process. In Canadian culture, we often want stuff over skill. But to truly create a green and sustainable child care centre, we need to be creative and resourceful.

Creativity, resourcefulness and community are at the essence of sustainability. Thankfully, child care practitioners, as a rule, live and breathe these qualities. So do children. There are endless ways to save money when enriching child care environments and designing sustainable centres and programs. The focus section looks at creative use of outdoor space, recycling and re-using materials to transform backyards into wonderlands for children, and ways to connect with the people in your community to get children outside and make green projects happen. This marks Part 2 of the Connecting Children to Nature theme of *Interaction*.

The *Ideas* journal explores ways to communicate with parents and build partnerships between parents and child care staff through informal communication, social teas, and community events.

Also, take a look at the highlights of the successful national conference co-hosted by the Manitoba Child Care Association and CCCF that took place in Winnipeg this past May. See snapshots of some of the hundreds of great people in child care who attended the conference, shared ideas and scooped up awards at the ceremony.

**Claire McLaughlin**, editor  
cmclaughlin@cccfcscg.ca

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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

## Welcome to New Member Council Representatives

CCCCF welcomes seven new representatives to its Member Council table, effective August 1, 2009.

- Sherill Brown of the Alberta Child Care Association
- Laurie Landy of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario
- Sarah Williams of the Alberta Family Child Care Association
- Sylvie Charron of the Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario
- Mary Burgaretta of the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
- Cynthia Dempsey of the Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick
- Sonya Corrigan of the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI

We also wish to thank the outgoing representatives, Marg Golberg, Diane Kashin, Deb Mytruk, Josée Latulippe, Karen Isaac, Linda Gould, and Rhéo Rochon respectively, on behalf of CCCC during their tenure. Their work towards children and families in Canada has been invaluable.

## Update on the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD)

The CEECD in partnership with the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development will be hosting a conference on the determinants of school readiness and school success in Québec City on November 12-13, 2009.

*Ready for School? Ready for Life?* will focus on the observed factors in early childhood that determine or influence school readiness. The conference will also highlight assessed practices that support children's school readiness and success. This two-day event will allow early childhood practitioners and other professionals to learn about the latest research in school readiness, discuss best practices and programs during panel and round tables discussions and acquire new skills through stimulating workshops.

For more information, please visit the conference Website at [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca).

A series of papers on the topics of numeracy, culture, brain and play have been posted on the CEECD online Encyclopedia. Check [www.child-encyclopedia.com/](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/) regularly for new postings!

- Valérie Bell

## Pat Wege

### Winner of the 2009 Canadian Child Care Federation's Award for Excellence in Child Care

CCCCF President Don Giesbrecht presented Pat Wege of the Manitoba Child Care Association with the 2009 CCCC Award for Excellence in Child Care at the Celebration Gala at the co-hosted MCCA and CCCC National Child Care Conference in Winnipeg this May.



Pat has worked tirelessly to improve the delivery of child care services in Manitoba for over 30 years. She has worked as a caregiver, manager, and presently as Executive Director of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

Her efforts have shaped and influenced the provinces' child care systems in every way. She is involved in policy development, research, quality promotion, regulatory review, professional development provision, working conditions for caregivers, work with media and advocacy with politicians and policy makers, and influenced the public's opinion of child care. Pat's contributions to the field cannot be measured and her influence has touched every part of child care in Manitoba and Canada.

The CCCC Award for Excellence in Child Care is presented every two years to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the child care field.



## INSIDE THE FEDERATION

## Building a foundation for numeracy is as easy as 1, 2, 3!

***New professional development and training resource for building a foundation for numeracy in young children – FREE early years volume for members of CCCF***

The everyday world for a young child is full of opportunities to engage with number and quantity. From the first few days of life, infants pay special attention to number in their environments. Babies' everyday experiences with quantity provide the foundation for more advanced math concepts that develop throughout early childhood and beyond. As babies grow into toddlers, their knowledge of counting and number has the potential to improve very quickly. Preschoolers are capable of thinking about arithmetic and can solve math problems in meaningful ways. Children who are provided with opportunities to engage in counting and participate in other numeracy activities that encourage logical thinking when they are young are the most ready to tackle the kinds of math they will see in school.

Children really enjoy numeracy activities and are highly motivated to work with numbers. They are eager to imitate the counting words used by adults and children label their toys with number words before they even they know what they mean. From observing children's play, it is clear that they are naturally attracted to mathematical

features in their environments. Toddlers and preschoolers have enormous mathematical potential. Realizing this potential is an important element of school readiness. Quality early learning environments therefore must provide encouragement and opportunities for children to think and talk about numbers and math in ways that connect to the real world that surrounds them.

CCCF has joined together with the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (CLLRN) to develop a Resource Kit containing 2 volumes of practical and research information on building a foundation for numeracy with young children.

The aim of this resource is to provide practitioners with information from recent findings of well-designed research studies on the development and teaching of mathematics. The resource has been divided into two volumes: one for early learning and child care practitioners, and the other for elementary school teachers. Both volumes can be used as a reference tool in daily practice. This resource will supplement and enhance your previous knowledge as well as hopefully

introduce some additional learning. It is designed to review what is *known* about development of mathematics skills, to identify *what* needs to be taught, and *how* it can be taught to ensure that all children succeed. It is a useful professional development resource for those working with young children and a learning resource for those in training to become practitioners.

As a benefit of being a member of the Canadian Child Care Federation, you will be receiving the early years volume for **FREE**...hot off the press! The expected dissemination date is late 2009. For more information, visit our website [www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca](http://www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca).

### CCCF Annual Report



CCCF's 2008-2009 Annual Report is now available. For an electronic copy, visit the CCCF website at [www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca](http://www.qualitychildcarecanada.ca). For a print copy, contact the office at [info@cccfcscge.ca](mailto:info@cccfcscge.ca) or (613) 729-5289

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## FROM WHERE I SIT

# The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child @ 20

by Lisa Wolff, UNICEF Canada

We sometimes hear adults suggest that children have “too many rights”, usually out of concern about children and youth who oppose what adults want them to do – or who are involved in harmful activities.

But few adults or children really know what rights children from birth to age 18 are actually entitled to in human rights and domestic law, and why they are so important.

Children, like all human beings, are born with inherent rights – rights to survival, to be protected from harm, to opportunities to develop, without discrimination based on who they or their parents are. These rights cannot be given or taken away. They are codified in international law like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to some extent in our domestic laws and Constitution. They can be provided for, or denied.

But rights are not about what *children* do, they are about what governments agree to do for children when they commit to treaties and laws. Rights transform what governments do from benevolent impulses – like whether or not to fund primary education for every child, and whether or not to ensure every child has a legal identity – into duties and obligations that must be honoured. When rights are fully provided, the result is usually children who are healthy, productive and respectful citizens and family members.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Canada signed the Convention in 1989, along with so many other nations that the Convention became the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history.

So let’s take this opportunity to look at how far we’ve travelled in twenty years to provide for and protect the rights of children, and what steps we need to take next as a country that keeps its promises for children.

**“The youngest children in our society do not have a fair call on the nation’s resources. Canada is one of the most affluent industrialized countries (by GDP) and the majority of our children are in some form of early child care, but we invest only 0.2% GDP in early child care and education.”**

In UNICEF’s 2007 comparative study of child well-being in the world’s richest countries, Canada was in the middle – ranked 12 of 21 other affluent countries – on an index of 24 indicators of children’s rights and well-being<sup>1</sup>.

Our report found that we are doing quite well in the provision of children’s right to education. Our education system does a comparatively good job of not only equipping our children with functional skills, but evening out the disadvantage of social and economic marginalization.

Breastfeeding rates are increasing – and need to advance further. We have a new commitment to improve the mental health of children and adults. Most provinces have independent advocates for children. There are considerable advances in federal and provincial legislation that better protect children from injury and exploitation.





But in some fundamental aspects of survival and health, the state of our children is alarming. Canada has the technology, the information and the resources to ensure the highest possible state of health for their children. Yet in infancy, Canada's children have an infant mortality rate that is stagnating relative to many other affluent countries, at 5 deaths per 1,000 live births<sup>2</sup>. Canada ranks at 161 of 189 countries on under-5 mortality<sup>3</sup>, at a rate similar to that in Croatia and in Malta. In Canada, unintentional injury remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 14<sup>4</sup>. Canada ranks only 22 out of 29 industrialized countries when it comes to the rate of preventable childhood injuries and deaths.

But national averages tell us very little about the most vulnerable populations. The infant death rate among First Nations children living on reserves is estimated at 8 deaths per 1,000 live births<sup>5</sup>, comparable with Latvia and Lithuania. The rate in Nunavut (where about 85 percent of the population is Inuit) is more than three times the national rate at 16 deaths per 1,000 live births<sup>6</sup> – almost equal to that in Sri Lanka and Fiji<sup>7</sup>.

The disparities between First Nations, Inuit and Métis children relative to national averages is one of the most significant challenges facing our country as we work to progressively implement international human rights commitments.

“The youngest children in our society do not have a fair call on the nation's resources. Canada is one of the most affluent industrialized countries (by GDP) and the majority of our children are in some form of early child care, but we invest only 0.2% GDP in early child care and education<sup>8</sup>. Sweden invests 1.26%<sup>9</sup>. UNICEF's Report Card on early child care and education reported that we are meeting only one of ten benchmarks for the provision of early child care and education services that have a strong probability for good outcomes for children<sup>10</sup>.”

The Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges governments to ensure that they invest in children to the highest possible standard, make decisions in the best interests of children, and reach children without discrimination or inequity. Recommendations from the United Nations in 2003<sup>11</sup> and 2008<sup>12</sup>, and from the Senate in 2007<sup>13</sup>, have identified the need to do more to fulfill our promises.

Internationally, Canada was among the founders of the United Nations and has a long history of support for human rights. It has been continuously engaged with every human rights declaration, covenant and convention that has been negotiated under the authority of the United Nations since the end of the Second World War. Canada played a significant role in drafting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child between 1979 and 1989, and in the Optional Protocols related to child exploitation and to children in armed forces.

This year, twenty years after we signed onto the Convention, Canada is due to report again to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Can we say we are providing the best we have to give? What can we do to accelerate our progress for children?

“Most pressingly, Canada can establish a national Children's Commissioner. No office of the federal government has the responsibility to hear children's views and call attention to their best interests at the national level, as in most provinces. No one is charged with ensuring that our federal laws, policies and programs are viewed through the lens of child and youth needs, and that negative and positive impacts on children are considered before enactment.”

Based on UNICEF's research on the impact of Children's Commissioners in dozens of countries, we are confident that this measure would raise children up on the political agenda. A Children's Commissioner would monitor implementation of the Convention, review proposed legislation and policy, make annual reports to Canadians on the status of children and their rights, help co-ordinate the substantial work being done by federal and provincial governments and children's advocates, call attention to looming concerns before they mushroom into epidemic proportions, and work to reduce the gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

Twenty years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted, Canada does many things very well for many children. It is possible to do more for all children.

#### Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF, Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries, *Innocenti Report Card 7*, 2007, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.
- 2 UNICEF, Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries, *Innocenti Report Card 7*, 2007, p 14, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.
- 3 UNICEF State of the World's Children Report 2008, “Under 5 Mortality Rankings,” Statistical Tables, p 113.
- 4 Public Health Agency of Canada, Leading Causes of Death, Canada, 2004.
- 5 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Basic Departmental Data (2002), [http://www.aicnac.gc.ca/pr/sts/bdd02/bdd02\\_e.pdf](http://www.aicnac.gc.ca/pr/sts/bdd02/bdd02_e.pdf).
- 6 The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2008.
- 7 Canadian data from “The Chief Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2008” and international comparisons from UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children*, 2009.
- 8 OECD, Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/44/37423348.pdf>
- 9 UNICEF, The child care transition, *Innocenti Report Card 8*, 2008, p 27, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.
- 10 UNICEF, The child care transition, *Innocenti Report Card 8*, 2008 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.
- 11 Committee on the Rights of the Child, Thirty-fourth session Consideration of Reports submitted by States Parties under article 44 of the Convention, Concluding observations: Canada, CRC/C/15/Add.215 27 October 2003.
- 12 Human Rights Council - Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Fourth Session, Geneva, 2-13 February 2009. “Compilation Prepared by the Office of The High Commissioner for Human Rights, in accordance with paragraph 15(B) of the Annex to the Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1 – Canada”.
- 13 Children: The Silenced Citizens, Effective Implementation of the Canada's International Obligations with Respect to the Rights of Children, Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007.





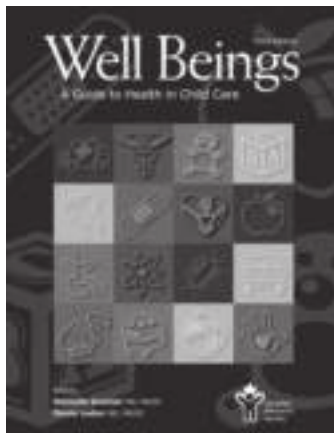
## BOOK REVIEW

# Well Beings

## A Guide to Health in Child Care,

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

by Sharon Sangster



**Well Beings, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition:**  
A Guide to Health in Child Care

**Editors:**  
Danielle Grenier MD, FRCPC  
Denis Leduc MD, FRCPC  
Price: \$69.95

**To order:**  
[http://www.cps.ca/english/  
Publications/Bookstore/WellBeings.htm](http://www.cps.ca/english/Publications/Bookstore/WellBeings.htm)

*Well Beings* has been a supportive guide for child care practitioners since 1992. This revised third edition is full of tips, advice, checklists and information on health in child care. The medical content was developed by the Canadian Pediatric Society, and a network of child care and early learning professionals contributed their valuable insight for the remaining chapters.

The topics range from safety to health issues, nutrition

to transportation and a wonderful chapter on children's emotional well being. The special needs and protection of children is also covered.

Divided into sections for easy reference, the information provided is clear and concise. Explanations and "what to do" inform the reader about a topic from start to finish. Illustrations throughout the book add a visual aid to ensure clarity on certain issues.

The publication maintains a thorough guide for overall child care but it also has a very good section on health care for professionals working in this field. The importance of the child care profession is emphasized while pointing out some hazards that can accompany it. Preventative methods are illustrated for the caregiver, such as how to lift children and equipment correctly, relating to co-workers, and a fabulous section on discovering your favorite age group. It has been a resourceful tool for both parents and students.

After each section there is an extensive list of resources pertaining to the information which is easily accessible for the reader. Check lists, injury reports, charts and action plans help to outline an organized facility.

*Well Beings* is a must have addition to any resource library for children. The extensive range of topics covered, as well as the easy style in which it is written, provides a valuable guide for those involved in caring for our children.

Sharon Sangster is a parent and an Early Childhood Educator living in Ottawa.


**Manitoba Child Care Association**

**2010**

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# ECEs and Retention – Is It All About the Money?

By Lindsay Buset

I have worked in the Early Childhood Education field for seven years. In 2007, I left the field to further my education. At this time, low wages were indeed a variable affecting my decision to leave; although personally, it was not the driving force. During my studies I had an opportunity to network with many directors and was able to hear many of their concerns. The consistent theme that continued to reoccur was the issue of retention. Directors were concerned that they were not able to retain qualified Early Childhood Educators. When I asked why this was, the answer was not only stated by one or two directors, the answer was declared in unison by 30 directors. They stated that the reason they could not retain their ECE staff was solely due to the low wages they were offering. A director stated that she was losing her staff to the local gas station because they were able to offer better monetary benefits than her centre was able to.

I questioned if this was the only reason every single one of their Early Childhood Educators were leaving their centers. I could not fathom the idea that money was the sole variable directing ECEs' decisions on whether or not to stay in the field. To answer my burning questions, I decided to do some action research. I developed a survey for ECEs called, *I need your input* to ask Early Childhood Educators in Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta various questions about their attitude, feelings and ideas relating to retention in the field.

I asked ECEs if they had thoughts about leaving the field entirely and 13 out of 30 individuals stated they had not, while 17 out of 30 stated yes they had thought about leaving the field. Interestingly, an overwhelming 90% of the people stating they were thinking about leaving had thought about

this within the past year. This information affirms what the directors were stating, that ECE retention is a concern.

But why are Early Childhood Educators thinking about leaving the field in the first place? In the survey, *I need your input*, a question was given asking why an Early Childhood Educator would first think about leaving the field. Responses were astonishing. The most frequently noted responses were: not enough recognition, low staff morale, the director does not advocate on behalf of his or her staff, stress on body, lack of support from director, lack of appreciation, and feeling as if there were no incentives to continue working. Interestingly, not one of these reasons for leaving the profession related to their wage, or lack thereof.

I wondered whether the issue of retention was moving away from the monetary variable and pointing more towards strong leadership and what this would mean to the directors who believed it had to do solely with wage. In the same survey, the Early Childhood Educators were asked: *If you were an employee thinking about leaving the ECE field because of low wages, would a director with the following attributes make you think*

*twice about your decision? Strong leadership skills, a forward thinking attitude, passionate about the ECE field, encouraged you as an ECE to embrace your professionalism, and a leader with a vision.* Astonishingly, 25 out of the 30 Early Childhood Educators answered “yes” that if their leader embodied these qualities it would in fact CHANGE an Early Childhood Educator’s mind to stay in the field, regardless of money.

Could these directors really have that much of an influence on the retention issues they face? The survey asked that very

**“I want to encourage not only leaders and directors, but all individuals involved in early childhood education and care to look closely at the motivations their particular staff members find valuable and intrinsically inspiring.”**



question. Do you feel that the director of your centre has an impact on the retention of his or her employees? Of the 30 Early childhood Educators who responded, 29 indicated YES they felt directors had an impact on the retention of the centre. Early Childhood Educators believed things such as, “directors should provide leadership and be role models, and need to help set goals and build on professional skills”; the director should be a mentor and help develop a role in our community; and directors have the ability to set the tone and dynamic for the day”.

In the survey, Early Childhood Educator’s stated that the highest rated benefits they wanted had to do with staff morale, recognition, and strong leadership in their place of employment. The lowest rated benefits were related to monetary concerns, such as a yearly bonus, or a raise.

Early Childhood Educators are clearly saying there is more to their retention than the money; other variables need to be addressed. They are also saying that these other variables influencing their decision to leave have much to do with

the positive leadership skills their directors and leaders possess. This evidence can give directors and other members concerned with child care retention some valuable insight.

In no way does this collection of research suggest that money is not important. What it does prove is that money clearly is not the only variable relating to Early Childhood Educator retention. It goes much deeper. I want to encourage not only leaders and directors, but all individuals involved in early childhood education and care to look closely at the motivations their particular staff members find valuable and intrinsically inspiring. I truly believe that attitude is a choice, not a circumstance. Therefore the way in which we choose to look at this issue, will essentially affect the outcome we receive. It may not be solely about the money after all.

This research was conducted by Lindsay Buset for a class called Topics in ECCE Leadership at the University of Winnipeg. She has been working as an Early Childhood Educator in the field for the past 7 years and just finished her Bachelor of Arts degree in Developmental Studies with a specialization in Inclusion.

If you wish to see the survey or research report, Lindsay Buset can be reached by e-mail at: [lindsaybuset@gmail.com](mailto:lindsaybuset@gmail.com)

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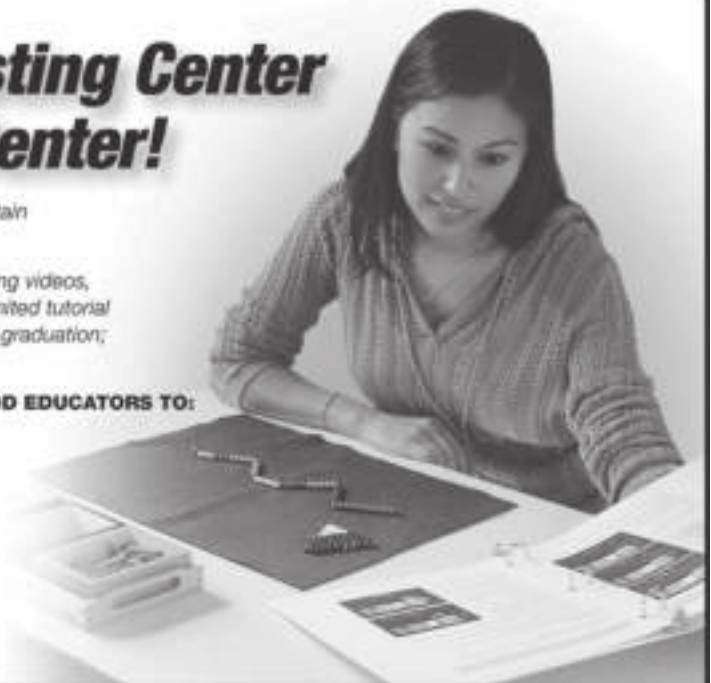
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Philosophy: The North American Montessori Center subscribes to the view that education should be progressive and needs to provide an open-ended view of the Montessori approach to Early Childhood Development. It seeks to transform the classical Montessori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





# When was the last time you did a back up of your data?

As business owners and managers, we all know the importance of backing up our electronic data. But do we actually do it? Len Andrusiak, of GotData.ca, an online data backup service, has seen it all. "We deal with data loss every week and believe me; it's difficult sitting down with someone who's just lost all of their computer files. I've seen people break down and cry when they realize the severity of the situation."

So why is the process of backing up computer files so painful for many business owners and managers? The reasons are many: it's cumbersome, it's time consuming, it's expensive and a general pain in the butt. As well, there's a prevailing attitude that *'A hard drive crash will never happen to me'*, but it will happen to everyone eventually.

Options for data backup can be costly. That's where the online backup of GotData shines. "Once GotData is installed it runs automatically requiring little or no management," says Andrusiak. "Backups are done as documents are saved and closed. Files are encrypted before they leave your computer and are stored securely off site so if you are the victim of theft or fire, your data is safe," he added.

There is no question that technology is now the lifeblood of business operations. Online backup can now be found successfully integrated into many business sectors including medical, accounting, manufacturing, financial management and insurance. Even the child care industry is getting on board.

Many members of the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF) now successfully use the online backup service of GotData. Andrusiak has also set up a fund-raising opportunity to Federation members. If a CCCC member signs up to the service, GotData will defer a portion of the monthly fee directly back to the CCCC. This fundraising opportunity is also available to individual day care centres.

What's it like to lose all your data? It's not a place where you want to be. Andrusiak recalls a particular incident from the recent past.

"A medical office with a paperless scheduling system had a hard drive crash. When they tried to recover data from the one and only backup disk, it turned out that the backup wasn't working properly. They lost everything. The doctors had no idea who was coming in for an appointment the next day, week or month. They ended up placing ads on television, radio and in local newspapers requesting that patients contact the clinic. It cost them a fortune," recalls Andrusiak.

Andrusiak warns, "Don't let USB jump drives give you a false sense of security. They are not a safe, secure or reliable method of backing up your files. Your entire list of contacts and their personal information will be compromised if the wrong person takes possession."

To find more about GotData, how it works and to sign up, visit [www.GotData.ca](http://www.GotData.ca)

## The Top 6 questions asked by the majority of businesses using GotData.ca:

### **How secure is your data storage?**

Banks use 128 bit encryption, we use 448 bit encryption.

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Yes. Install the software on 1 to 10,000 computers if you like. The software is free to use and we don't charge a license fee. You only pay for what you store. If you only store 2 GB from 10 different computers, you still only pay \$5.95 per month.

### **Will I be able to access my data remotely?**

Access your data from any computer in the world that has internet connectivity.

GotData?ca



# Food for Thought:

## A Sensitive Approach to Sensory Curriculum in Infant & Toddler Programs

by Tina Bonnett

The importance of sensory experiences has long been valued by child developmental theorists, early intervention specialists and Early Childhood Educators. In quality Early Childhood Programs sensory play is typically viewed as a key learning experience and is utilized as a therapeutic intervention tool to calm and soothe children. Sensory curriculum is essential in infant and toddler programs and continues to be a fundamental need of many children throughout the early years.

### The Mouth as a Primary Learning Tool for the Infant & Toddler

Since the onset of child development research it has been recognized that children learn best when they experience the world around them in a concrete way. Child development theorist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), identified an infant's development in the first two years of life as the *sensorimotor* stage. This sensory and motor focus is vividly apparent at birth when the newborn's response is to search for their mother by touching, smelling & tasting breast milk. This sensorial and motor learning pattern continues to emerge as the infant begins to suck on their thumb or soother, mouth their hands, feet and toys, work to get their caregivers facial parts in their mouth and eventually explore pablum and pureed foods. Although all senses partake in these processes, much of the learning that unfolds in the first year of life is attributed to the infant's *oral* exploration of materials.

As the child moves into the toddler years the need to investigate surroundings orally continues to be prevalent in many children. The toddler explores their environment through mouthing and biting of toys, blowing bubbles, and learning to



**If our programs are truly family centred, then it is of utmost importance that we mirror the child's home food practices in our curriculum.**

drink from a cup. Many one and two-year-olds will also strive to process information about their surroundings by chewing on sand, playdough, snow, twigs and any other substance that they encounter. Environments for infants and toddlers should therefore be plentiful in objects that can be mouthed as the mouth provides an oral outlet for children and allows them to gain rich information about their world.

### Rationales of Food Usage in Past and Present Times

As Early Childhood Educators we are keenly aware of the need of the child to investigate using an active learning approach, namely by using their mouth. In years past we acknowledged the oral sensory need of the child by incorporating food into our programs. Sensory bins were filled with cheerios, rice, beans, corn flour, oatmeal and other food items. This undoubtedly acknowledged the child's need to learn with their mouth and provided a safe and non-toxic



means of doing so. In today's world, however, it has become debatable as to whether food items in sensory play best support the child in all developmental domains and in the context of gaining and understanding of global issues.

Although it is crucial that we continue to value the role that the sensorimotor stage plays in the developing child, it is as equally important to acknowledge that for many families food is in shortage. In considering that one out of every six children in our early intervention programs are living in a state of poverty (CBC Website, 2009) and over 200 000 people immigrate to Canada each year from war and famine stricken countries (Wikipedia, 2009), it is imperative that we present food to children in a way that fosters a healthy understanding of its *function and worth*.

In considering the cultural richness of our country and the customs and traditions that are a part of the lives of many of the children and families in our care, we must stop to consider what message we are sending children when at-home food is viewed in the context of religion and/or a belief system, but in our early years programs it is used with little fixed value.

If our programs are truly family centred, then it is of utmost importance that we mirror the child's home food practices in our curriculum.

## Responsible Use of Food in our Early Years Programs

It is imperative that each playroom carefully consider the needs, customs and beliefs of the families in their program as sensory experiences are planned.

Responsible use of food in sensory curriculum should include:

- Inclusion of the diverse cultural foods consumed by the families in your program
- Parent education opportunities regarding the goals of your sensory curriculum
- Daily dialogue with children about the value and worth of food
- Healthy food choices and experiences from all four food groups
- Avoidance of offering food as a bribe or withholding food as a consequence
- Providing for and respecting children's food preferences and dislikes
- Opportunities for the children to experience the food cycle in its entirety (from seed to plant to harvest to table to compost)
- Photo documentation of sensory experiences that demonstrate the value of the activity

- Artifacts in each child's developmental portfolio demonstrating the learning that has unfolded as a result of the food experience
- The educator's modeling of appropriate food usage
- Appropriate food handling and hygienic practices to avoid transmittance of communicable diseases
- Active supervision of all food experiences
- Consideration of food as a choking hazard or allergen
- A collection box of non perishable and fresh food items for families in your program that are in need
- Encouraged *full* sensory exploration of food during snack and meal times
- Inclusion of infants & toddlers in food preparation and serving of their own portions
- Flexibility to adapt as the needs of the families in your program change

## Curriculum Ideas

Place a pineapple or melon on the floor for investigation. Touch, roll, explore and eventually eat the fruit.

Include the infant and young toddler in the process of pureeing their lunch or snack.

Incorporate basic recipes such as squishing steamed apples through a strainer to make apple sauce.

Plant both indoor and outdoor gardens. Use the harvested food in cooking experiences.

Place a bag of multigrain pretzels on the floor. Encourage the children to poke, squeeze, and smell. Later enjoy as a part of snack.

Put vegetables for steaming in a clean bucket with water and some scrub brushes. Encourage the children to scrub the vegetables in preparation to be cooked for mealtime.

Have the toddler squeeze oranges or grapefruits to make homemade juice for snack.

Have the children puree fruit. Put into a container with frozen yogurt. Shake to enjoy a fruit smoothie.

## Finding a Balance

When planning the environment for sensory play the optimum goal is to find a balance to ensure that the unique needs of *all* families are met. What works in one playroom may not work in another. In comparison to other debatable issues in our field, food usage in sensory play should not be approached with the





hope of attaining a universal right or wrong, but with the intent of planning to create a high quality program that fosters the growth of each unique child and their family.

Attaining balance in sensory curriculum is also obtained by careful integration of both food *and* non food related items. Our very rich Canadian environment not only provides us with a variety of tasty foods, but also with seasons and geography that foster full sensorial exploration. Although responsible incorporation of food in sensory play can set the stage for concrete and meaningful learning, non-food items from nature and the world around us are as equally worthy of consideration as we plan for the environments in our early years programs.

### Food for Thought...

As with all areas of curriculum it is imperative that sensory play be given much forethought in regards to its function. Critical thinking and reflective practice on the part of the educator will ensure that food related experiences in the playroom are facilitated in a way that fosters an appreciation for both the food value itself *and* for the full sensorial needs of the young child who is typically oral in nature.

**Food is a commonality amongst all children and therefore holds a significant place in our early year's curriculum. With sensitive and responsive planning we, as educators, are in an ideal position to nourish both the body and mind of each child.**

Food is a commonality amongst all children and therefore holds a significant place in our early year's curriculum. With sensitive and responsive planning we, as educators, are in an ideal position to nourish both the body and mind of each child.

Tina Bonnett is a member of the faculty in the Early Childhood Education Program at Fanshawe College. She is a graduate of York's Infant Mental Health Program and has recently completed a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education with a focus on the correlation between attachment relationships and the primary care-giving approach. Tina previously worked in the Mary J. Wright Laboratory Preschool at the University of Western Ontario and in the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program.

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# Holding, Walking and Rocking

## Time Out for Strollers, Car Seats and Swings

by Suzanne Major BA, CE, MA Ece

We all know the difference between necessities, needs and desires. Necessities as Yvan Illich (2004, p.75) wrote are binding and tied to our survival like having water, food and shelter. Needs call for satisfaction as they create the disagreeable feeling that something is missing, like having new fashionable clothes. We can live without them but we are somewhat unhappy if we don't have them. Desires are more deep rooted and romantic in nature like having our dream home. Necessities are biological. Needs are created in our social world. Desires are more symbolic and emanate from our whole being. We might know the difference between them, but we don't always control ourselves when it comes time to respond to them.

A young friend of mine about to have a baby was able to make a list of necessities without a problem. When it came time to make choices between needs and desires, things got more complicated. Was she to purchase that charming and reasonably priced bassinet or the pricy deluxe super model that her child certainly deserved? The desire to offer the world to the adored child is not a need or a necessity but it expresses our will to do everything right for that child and to offer what we did or did not get ourselves. In this process, something else happens as we become acutely aware of our own social status; a status that we are about to bequeath to that child. The deluxe super model is wishful thinking that might just put us on the road to a better life.

I witnessed a parent committee in a notable day care centre in Montreal a few years ago meticulously shop around for the best director they could hire. She was a university graduate in early childhood education. When it came time for the parent committee to purchase the toys, the games and the equipment for the day care centre they surprisingly omitted to consult with their new director. Like children in Santa's work shop,

they fulfilled all of their desires for their children. Among the necessities missing were diapering tables, windows that could be opened for fresh air and separate sinks for diapering and preparing food. Educational needs for children were partly and accidentally met as age appropriate material was randomly chosen.

Pedagogical needs for teachers and educators were ignored but nevertheless, the parents were delighted with the results. They believed they offered their children the best money could buy, hiring, for example, an artist to decorate the walls of the day care centre — but making them impossible to use to show off the children's artwork. Esthetical concerns for the parents

dominated over needs and necessities.

If the day care centre was a gem on a visual level it was pedagogically ill equipped. They bought them an enviable social status by way of an elite day care centre and appearances had to be kept.

Necessities, needs and desires have to be analysed and choices must be judiciously made. A consumer-based society has preyed on parents, teachers and educators to create needs and desires developed on the basis of guilt and compensation. Afraid of not meeting the necessities and needs of our

children, we have adopted the notion of "quality time" at home and "personalized attention" at the day care centre because we cannot give them our full time attention. We created socialisation with friends at day care because we cannot give them siblings and neighbours to play with and learn from during the day. We create fenced in back yards and parks because we can't explore the field, the shore line, the forest or the pond with them in our daily lives. Parents make sure they have beautiful baby rooms to put them in, strollers to go around town in, car seats to carry them, swings to soothe them and activity centres to entertain them because they want only the best for them. Educators provide an ample supply of toys, games and activities, because they also want the best for them.

**The car seat may be safer than someone's arms, but it does not offer affective security, just containment. Carrying arms transfer feelings of protection and possession.**



With more and more children growing up primarily in day care instead of the family home, environments, materials, equipment and relationships in the early childhood culture have changed tremendously over the past twenty years. One element in particular is the increased physical distance between the child and the adult due to the use of equipment, the diminishing amount of time the child spends with its' person of attachment, and the reduced intensity of their affective relationship as autonomy is valued over affective dependency. Things are gained and things are lost and this is true in both environments but what about the necessities, needs and desires of small children?

Think about the differences in experiences between being carried in a car seat and being carried in someone's arms. The motion produced by walking is the same in the car seat as in someone's arms but it lacks the cuddling motion of arms. It also lacks the emanating warmth of the body as well as the proximity of the face of the person that the child can read to help mediate information. The proximity of the face can also allow the brush of kisses offered now and then and the soft spoken words uttered near the ear of the child. If the child is small enough, he or she might even hear the heart beat of the person holding them in sequence with the sound of foot steps. The car seat may be safer than someone's arms, but it does not

offer affective security, just containment. Carrying arms transfer feelings of protection and possession. They transfer information like 'get closer, stand up right, take it easy or hang on'. All of those experiences are stimulating for young children and help in their development.

The same goes for rocking in arms instead of automatic swings. The proximity of the human body helps mediate the information coming from the outside world. Our senses are the only tools we have to get information and they are biologically linked to our bodies and our minds. Using modern equipment actually distances the child from the adult and deprives him or her of their sensory-affective contexts which help mediate information and stimulate development. It is difficult to evaluate the consequences of this. Suzanne Zeedyk (2008) from the Dundee University's school of psychology tested the use of strollers for example, and determined that children facing away from the person pushing them were more stressed, laughed less and interacted half as much than those children who were facing the adult. Getting closer calls for time out for strollers, car seats, swings, and all that equipment we buy because we want to offer children the world. Getting closer for small children is in the realm of necessities and, I suspect, of unspoken desires.

Suzanne Major is a PhD student in anthropology of health and education in day care services, a program director for the early childhood and family certificate, early intervention and prevention at the University of Montreal.







# Paying Attention to Play

## Seeing the Complete Picture

by Diane Nyisztor and  
Barbara Marcus

Educators pay attention to what children do. We are constantly observing, listening and reflecting. As educators consider what children do in early childhood environments they plan, encourage, support, scaffold and intentionally intervene. When educators pay attention to children's *play* they observe and listen; seeing a myriad of skills being developed and concepts being formed. As educators pay attention to children's play they can intentionally extend and enhance development and learning. Opportunities for learning and development are supported through selective interventions and by providing children with the time and the freedom to explore play materials and ideas and have control over the path of their play.

### Recognizing Play

In play children elaborate on their knowledge and skills to take control of objects and themes. "Play is transformative; it changes children by giving them options and opportunities" (Marcus & Nyisztor, 2008, p. 302). Children build towers, make up stories, paint designs, make mud pies, put together puzzles, and continue to amaze educators with the combinations of skills and ideas that are used in their intuitive, organic play. Decision making during play and control of the action by the child is a key element that distinguishes play from other experiences that occur in an early childhood environment. Other experiences that are appropriate but are not play include: educator directed activities, invitingly set out prompted experiences, meal times, and transitions. Understanding this distinction enables educators to intervene in play in ways that do not usurp the control of the play but allow for brief intentional interventions. Because play can be interactive, the control has a fluid quality and may shift or be shared when other children or the educator becomes involved. Play in its most concentrated form is demonstrated



**Monitoring development means the educator is mindful of the skills that children are practising and encourages experimentation and risk taking so new and more complex skills will be tried. Development occurs over time and with practice.**

when a child has full control of the actions of pretend, the structure, and the materials used in play.

### Attention to Development and Learning

Educators pay attention to play through the lens of a trained professional always monitoring development and learning. While participating in a playful manner or intentionally joining to extend the play, educators listen, think and interact using the knowledge base of the early childhood profession.



## Skill development

Monitoring development means the educator is mindful of the skills that children are practising and encourages experimentation and risk taking so new and more complex skills will be tried. Development occurs over time and with practice. Children's play demonstrates the constant overlap and an inventive combination of skills. During play young children run and sing, sort and label, take turns, use binoculars and writing implements, at first with concerted effort and then with the ease of experienced practitioners.

Educators observe development closely and systematically and often use anecdotes and checklists to note those skills each child is demonstrating.

## Content and concept formation

Children incorporate, use, and talk about ideas during their play. Content refers to the ideas and information that the children have gathered. Educators can hear pieces of information such as; the names of dinosaurs, that a painting of trees is a landscape, what ingredients make a cake, who works at the hospital, and so much more. In play children also apply concepts that they are forming. Concepts refer to the broad understandings of ideas that children have put together to explain relationships and the workings of the world: why the dinosaurs disappeared, what makes a painting good, why certain foods are served for holidays and celebrations, how it feels to be in a hospital, and so many more. An intentional decision by the educator can be to notice information children have and concepts they are refining as they play. Listening to children's vocabulary, use of terminology, and explanations of everyday phenomena will provide insight into their compilation of content and the concepts they are forming.

## What the Educator Sees

*The educator of the 4 year old group is invited into the dramatic play area for a meal. Ava states that*

*she is the chef and that Matthew will be serving. Ava stands at the stove, stirring and humming. She announces that the rabbit stew is ready. Matthew stops in mid motion and very seriously says, "That's yuck - people can't eat rabbits. Rabbits jump on the ground and the ground has germs and germs are not good for people. So people can't eat rabbits."*

Paying attention to skill development, content and concept formation during play informs the educator's choices about

which materials to include in the environment, when to intervene with questions and suggestions, and provides opportunities to discover emerging interests. Reflecting on this observation, the educator sees:

- Skills:  
Complete articulated sentences  
Pretend play - role taking  
Logical thinking
- Content and Concepts:  
Stew is a type of meal  
There is a relationship between germs and people  
What is considered edible



**As children play they should be in control and determine the flow, direction, focus, or storyline of the experience.**

## Compatibility

Play, development and learning are compatible but are not the same. Some authors propose that because play is creative and spontaneous, even magical, then it must be kept separate and distinct from learning. However, based on research and evidence based practice, seeing "development and learning as interactive parts of human activities is increasing" (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006, p. 50). Children think about their play; have fun with it; re-orient its direction; create story lines; plan for extended explorations; and make decisions

about materials. This is the lens of the child. Educators apply a different lens. Paying attention to what happens during the play is the responsibility of the educator. Educators can intentionally see the skill development and learning. In observing young children in early childhood environments, it is clear that "there are dimensions of learning in play and



dimensions of play in learning” (Hewes, 2006, p. 2).

### Pleasure of Play

Play for children should always be pleasurable, joyful, fun, and even magical. It should encourage children to use materials and objects in combinations that make sense to them. As children play they should be in control and determine the flow, direction, focus, or story-line of the experience. Educators should support children’s play in every way that they can — especially by arranging for long periods of time for play and choosing to intervene only with intentionality. Props, materials, and objects that sustain and enhance the children’s play can be made available before and during play by educators who are paying attention to development and learning. During play, educators have a special role in an early childhood environment; they nurture, support, scaffold, teach, encourage, ignite imagination, and playfully participate. Children play; and within their play they develop and learn through the joy and pleasure of play.

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Barbara Marcus, M.Ed. has been in the field of early childhood education for over thirty-five years as both a college teacher and fieldwork supervisor. She is the co-author of a current text on curriculum.

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## HEALTH WATCH

# How Environmentally Healthy is your Child Care?

## A Checklist and Guide to Reduce Environmental Health Risks in Child Care Settings

This fall, the Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and Environment (CPCHE) will be releasing a *Checklist and Guide for Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) in Child Care Settings*. This practical and useful tool builds from the existing CPCHE resources (see below) and was developed with the guidance of an expert steering committee through a project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. A report on the level of awareness and existing practices on environmental health issues among PHIs within child care settings prepared for CPCHE by Ryerson University helped inform the development of the *Checklist and Guide*. During the month of July, a pilot project was conducted by five public health units across Ontario using this tool. Early feedback from child care practitioners was very enthusiastic indicating that they found the *Checklist* useful and relevant to their work.

In Canada, more than half of children aged six months to five years spend the majority of their waking hours in early learning and child care environments. During those hours, they receive care and nurturing, learn to socialize with their peers, and develop important skills. They also may come into contact with a variety of potentially harmful chemicals. While the exposure levels of these chemicals may be small, they can add up and in combination have the potential to contribute to asthma, learning disabilities, cancer, and other chronic conditions. The new *Checklist and Guide* will assist PHIs and child care practitioners to jointly and systematically assess potential environmental health issues in the indoor and outdoor environments and implement measures to reduce exposures and potential health risks.

The *Check List and Guide* is focused on environmental health issues and avoids duplicating what is already part of routine inspections. It does not replace the requirements of the Ontario regulations and standards. Child care practitioners can also use this tool to track their progress or conduct a self-assessment of their centre. This tool complements CPCHE’s *Environmental Health Childproofing Checklist for Early Learning and Child Care Facilities* available in the manual *Playing It Safe: Service Provider Strategies to Reduce Environmental Risks to Preconception, Prenatal and Child Health*.

#### CPCHE Resources:

- *Child Health and the Environment: A Primer*
- *Playing it Safe: Childproofing for Environmental Health brochure*
- *Playing It Safe: Service Provider Strategies to Reduce Environmental Risks to Preconception, Prenatal and Child Health*
- *CPCHE Fact Sheets* on key topics
- *A Father’s Day Report – Men, Boys and Environmental Health Threats*

All CPCHE resources are available in English and French in hard copy and electronically at [www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca).





## Building Partnerships Between Parents and Child Care Staff through Informal Communication

by *Brooke Fletcher & Michal Perlman*

Research shows that there are many benefits to building strong, supportive connections between families and school settings, including enhancing children's well-being, supporting their learning, and decreasing behaviour problems (see Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006). Until recently, the majority of literature surrounding home-school partnerships focused on efforts to involve families in their child's education in the formal school system and on intensive interventions aimed at engaging low-income parents in their children's lives. Considerably less attention was given to the idea of involving families within the child care setting. However, with increased maternal employment over the past several decades and the resulting rapid growth in the use of centre-based care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers, the concept that parents should be involved in the child care centre has been steadily gaining popularity. In this article we review some of the thinking about the importance of parental child care involvement. We then describe a study in which we observed the interactions that occurred between 1,087 parents and the staff in their child's centre when they dropped their children off in the morning.



### Parental Child Care Involvement

We view parental child care involvement as a means of integrating the child's experience in the child care centre with family life, supporting the continuity of care for children between these two environments. Parental child care involvement

therefore includes many different types of practices that build and strengthen partnerships between families and child care centres, such as welcoming parent volunteers in the classroom, maintaining frequently updated bulletin boards to keep parents informed of what is happening at the centre, sending home reports about individual children, and scheduling

parent information meetings. Given the educational background, training and responsibilities of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), this group of professionals is in a unique leadership position to forge centre and family connections as well as collaborate with parents in child-related and parenting issues.

## Parent-Staff Communication

Meaningful, two-way communication between parents and child care staff is often described as a critical type of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Fiese et al., 2006). Parent-staff communication includes information sharing between parents and child care staff regarding the child, his/her experiences, and developmental progress. Open communication is essential in creating continuity for children between home and the child care centre. If parents and centre staff exchange the unique information they each have about a child's experiences, both parties will be better able to provide the child with supportive, sensitive care. For example, if staff are not informed by parents about such daily occurrences as children's eating or sleeping patterns, the child's behaviour at the centre can be misinterpreted or overlooked. Frequent communication may be even more critical for supporting children's well-being in times when the family is going through a major life event, such as marital separation. In addition, parent-staff communication is important because it often acts as a gateway to other types of parental involvement in the child care centre, such as classroom volunteering or assisting with field trips (Keyes, 2002).

## Benefits of Parent-Staff Communication

Conceptually, parent-staff communication is a bi-directional process, requiring both parties to share



and solicit child-related and program-related information. There are many potential benefits of establishing frequent, two-way, meaningful communication between parents and centre staff, including:

### For the Child...

- Creates a connection between the home and the child care centre which can assist children in making smoother transitions between these two settings
- Supports children's academic progress by reinforcing what they have learned
- Addresses the needs underlying challenging behaviour by forming a caring, supportive network around the child
- Provides adult models of supportive and positive interactions

### For the Parent...

- Supports parents in developing and maintaining good relationships with their child
- Enables parents to more effectively monitor and support their child's development and progress
- Strengthens parents' ability to provide a positive and stimulating home for their child, reinforcing what they have learned at the centre

- Provides parents with a better understanding of the goals of the child care centre
- Creates a feeling of support from the centre in parents
- Offers parents information about resources in the community that are available to them

### For the Centre Staff...

- Enhances the staff's ability to develop relationships with each child, based on a better understanding of the individual characteristics of the child
- Provides information which enables centre staff to better understand the causes of a child's behaviour
- Supports staff in meeting the child's individual needs
- Enables staff to better understand parents' perceptions of the child care program
- Strengthens staff's understanding of individual families (including needs, goals, and concerns)

## Barriers to Parent-Staff Communication

Parental employment is often the main reason that young children are enrolled in centre-based care. The time available to working parents with young children for any type of parental involvement is therefore quite limited (Whitehead, 1998). With multiple children to care for and often little or no time allocated for preparing or engaging in activities related to parental involvement, child care staff also have limited time for such activities. Therefore, for parent-staff communication to be feasible, it likely cannot require significant amounts of time and should occur at mutually convenient times for both parents and centre staff. It is for these reasons that drop-off and pick-up times are likely to be the most practical opportunities for parents and staff to exchange important child-related information. However, many programs have reduced ratios and combined classrooms (e.g., children from classrooms A and B may be dropped off in room A until the staff

from room B arrive) during these times of the day. This may result in the primary staff member not being readily available to talk with parents at some centres. This presents another barrier to parent-staff communication.

## Examining Informal Parent-Staff Communication During Morning Drop-Off

We recently completed a research study designed to provide insight into whether parents and centre staff use the daily morning drop-off period as an opportunity for parent-staff communication. We were particularly interested in examining the quality of information (e.g., small talk versus child-specific information) that was being exchanged between parents and staff during this transition period.

## Methods

The study included 122 classrooms serving preschool-aged children in 83 childcare centres located in Toronto and Colorado. In each of the participating classrooms, trained data collectors observed and coded communication between parents and child care staff during the drop-off period. As the morning-drop off period also provides parents with an opportunity to observe their child's interactions with staff (another type of parental child care involvement), we also coded the extent to which staff communicated with children upon their arrival in the classroom. Observers received extensive training and testing to ensure that they interpreted and coded the data in the same way across classrooms and time. In total, we collected drop-off data for 1,087 parents. The number of parents observed in each classroom varied between 2 and 19, with the majority of classrooms (73.7%) having observations collected for 7 to 13 parents. We also collected parental involvement data through questionnaires that were completed by 229 staff members and 652 parents. The results of our study are described below.

## Results from Observational Data

### *Length of Stay in the Classroom.*

Approximately 6% of parents stayed in the classroom for over five minutes during drop-off. The remaining 94% of parents spent an average of 67 seconds in the classroom during drop-off.

*Greeting Parents.* Sixty-five percent of parents were greeted by a staff member either verbally or nonverbally (e.g., smile) upon entering their child's classroom. Of these parents that were greeted, 12% were greeted by name. The remaining 35% of parents were never greeted by any of the staff present in the classroom while dropping-off their child.

*Greeting Children.* Approximately 78% of children were greeted by a staff member either verbally or nonverbally upon entering the classroom (61% of these children were greeted by name). The remaining 22% of children were not greeted either verbally or nonverbally by any of the staff present in the classroom. Thus, parents observe their children being greeted more warmly by staff than they are themselves.

*Nonverbal Communication.* The most frequent way in which staff were observed to communicate with parents during drop-off was nonverbally, with 39.7% of parents being smiled at by a staff member.

*Verbal Communication.* Verbal exchanges between staff and parents were much less frequent than nonverbal exchanges. Staff engaged in small talk with approximately 13% of parents. They shared child-related and program-related information with only 8.1% and 8.8% of parents, respectively. This finding is consistent with previous research that reports that when parents and child care staff communicate during transition times, they rarely discuss child-related issues (Endsley & Minish, 1991; McBride, Bae, & Wright, 2002; Winkelstein, 1981).

### *Initiating Child-Related Conversation.*

The data suggested that parents were more likely than staff to use the drop-off period as an opportunity to discuss child-related issues, as 31.6% of parents were observed to provide this type of information to child care staff. As staff were found to solicit child-related information in 8.9% of observations, it seems that parents generally initiate such exchanges during drop-off. Fortunately, the vast majority (85%) of those parents who do provide information received an active response from staff.

### *Communicating with Parents versus Communicating with Children.*

Staff members were observed to communicate more with children than with parents during the drop-off time. The most frequent type of verbal communication that staff directed at





**Table 1: Results from a Parent Survey**

Content of Communication	Percentage of Parents
Child's Behavior at Centre	91%
Child's Social Development	74%
Child's Intellectual Development	65%
Specific Events of the Day	63%
Child's Health	59%
Child's Behaviour at Home	51%
The Curriculum / Program of the Centre	41%
Child's Physical Development	40%
Other Children at the Centre	25%

*When parents and staff do discuss child-related and program-related information face-to-face, what specific topics are they most likely to discuss? We asked parents in our study to complete a questionnaire which required them to check-off a list of child-related and program-related topics which they have discussed with the staff at their child's centre. We received completed questionnaires from a total of 652 parents. The above table reports the percentage of parents that indicated they discussed each topic with the staff at their child's centre (e.g., 91% of parents reported that they discuss their child's behaviour at the centre with classroom staff).*

children was asking the child a question (44.7% of children). This was followed by initiating small talk with the child (17.1% of children), attempting to engage the child in a classroom activity (16.8% of children), and providing information to the child (10.5%), such as explaining activities that are planned for the day.

#### **Assisting Children During Drop-Off.**

Approximately 6% of children were observed to resist their parents' departure from the classroom. Staff provided transition support to the vast majority of these children (86.7%).

#### **Predicting the Amount of Parent-Staff Communication.**

Using complex statistical analyses (HLM), we explored factors that might explain the amount and type of communication that took place. The average levels of staff education, years of experience in the field, amount of professional development hours, and amount of supervision in the classroom did not predict the amount of parent-staff communication that was observed to take place during the drop-off period. The average child-to-staff ratio of the room also did not significantly influence

the amount of parent-staff communication that was observed to take place.

### **Results from Survey Data**

#### **Parent-Staff Communication and Other Types of Parental Involvement.**

Both parents and child care staff reported (via questionnaires) that the most common method of communication that they engaged in with one another was face-to-face communication (followed by telephone conversations, written communication, and email/voicemail). Overall, our data suggested that different types of parental involvement (e.g., parent-staff communication during drop-off, classroom volunteering, bulletin boards containing information for parents, etc) were not associated with one another. That is, staff/centre efforts to establish and maintain positive partnerships with parents (such as by posting program-related information on conveniently located bulletin boards) was not related to the amount of parent-staff verbal communication that was observed to take place during the morning drop-off time.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

Given the time constraints that both child care staff and working parents of

young children experience, the daily drop-off and pick-up periods are likely one of the most practical opportunities for staff to build relationships with parents and keep them informed of their child's life in the centre, but may not necessarily be the best. The results of our study indicate that, in reality, parent-staff communication during morning drop-off is very limited. Parents spent an average of 67 seconds in their child's classroom during morning drop-off. Approximately 35% of parents and 22% of children were not greeted by centre staff upon entering the classroom. Staff were observed to provide child-related and program-related information to less than 9% of parents. For logistical reasons, we did not collect data during afternoon pick-up. It may be the case that parents are less rushed and therefore exchange more information with staff when picking up their child at the end of the workday. However, previous research (Endsley & Minish, 1991) reports that the classroom environment is more conducive to parent-staff communication in the morning than the afternoon (i.e., more staff are available for parents to communicate with, rooms are more quiet and calm, and primary staff are more likely to be present) and that parent-staff communication does not significantly differ in frequency, length, content or usefulness between drop-off and pick-up times. These previous findings suggest that the results of our study would be similar to what we would have observed had we collected data at the afternoon pick-up time in addition to the morning drop-off period.

With recent discussions in early childhood education circles surrounding the importance of connecting families and centres, our finding that very little information sharing between child care staff and parents is taking place at drop-off times raises some concerns. Fortunately, increasing the frequency and improving the quality of parent-staff communication may be



more a function of awareness of their importance than the need for additional resources. Something as simple as greeting a parent as they walk into the classroom can provide a parent with a feeling of comfort and ease or the social contact that they may require to initiate information exchanges. The move to a Primary Caregiver model of assigning individual children and their families to one specific staff member is one strategy that may help to focus the responsibility of building relationships with families on each professional rather than diffusing it across many staff. As such, parent-staff communication may be one aspect of child care quality that can be improved upon even when resources, including time, are scarce.

Brooke Fletcher is a Ph.D. student in the School and Clinical Child Psychology Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Under the supervision of Dr. Michal Perlman, Brooke's research examines aspects of child care quality. This article is based on her Masters thesis entitled, *Parental Involvement in Child Care Settings: The Role of Informal Parent-Staff Communication*.

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# Communicating with Parents

by Evelyn Fletcher

## My Perspective

I work at A Child's Place Preschool in Brantford, Ontario. We offer half day programs both in the morning and afternoon for children between 2 ½ and 5 years of age. There are 24 children at a time. We operate on a school year schedule. Each year we accommodate about 80 children. There are a lot of people to get to know!

## A Big First Step!

More often than not a nursery school or a child care centre is the first experience that a parent has leaving her or his children with someone other than family members. It is also likely the first time that a child has been left with people that she or he doesn't know. It can be a very exciting, emotional and anxious transition for families. I feel that making that transition as smooth as possible is an important part of my job as an Early Childhood Educator (ECE). At our centre we strive to make our

preschool a warm and inviting place to be, and in a sense, an extension of the child's home. We want parents to feel comfortable with the choice that they have made for their child's care and secure in knowing that their child's well being - physically, socially and emotionally - is our main concern.

## Familiarity

Taking the time to learn about each child's family is an important part of an ECE's role. I make an effort to learn parents' first names. It makes conversation so much more personal. When a family starts at our preschool, they usually stay with us through several years as we get to know each of their children. This is the easy part. We've become familiar with the parents, the oldest child and then the younger siblings. Quite often grandparents drop-off or pick-up their grandchildren and share in daily care. Other relatives are also introduced



and so, by association, feel they know us too. When a new family comes along, it is important to take the time to get to know them and help them become acquainted with our program and all we have to offer. We begin with a spring visit to see the preschool in operation. During the latter part of August, we have an Open House for the entire family that has a fair quality to it. Nursery school starts in September and by then the new family and returning families are fairly familiar with their surroundings and have met or become reacquainted with the staff.

## Communication Equals Caring

The morning drop-off time in early childhood programs can be very busy. On some days there isn't time for more than a greeting, a smile and a quick: *"How are things today?"* conversation. Although this is sometimes the case, it is much more helpful to everyone when useful information can be exchanged. Parents have first hand information about their child that can be helpful to caregivers. Did their child have a good night's sleep? Did they have time for breakfast? Are they upset because of something that happened that morning? Knowing these things can make everyone's day run much smoother. This type of communication makes childcare personal.

I also try to connect with the individual parent. It can be something as simple as offering to help his/her child take off her winter boots when I notice that a parent is particularly rushed during drop-off, or to hold the baby while a parent says good-bye to her/his preschooler for the morning. Once you get to know a family, you can often sense when something is not right. Inquiring about a parent's well-being often opens up conversation and helps to gain insight into how the

child's day might go. Something as simple as, "Is everything okay?" can open up floodgates. There could be a grandparent ill, marital troubles or a baby that had a sleepless night. Such a conversation provides an opportunity to offer help, whether through community resources or just another adult ear to listen. When it is appropriate, I find that parents benefit from being introduced to another parent at the centre who had a similar experience and could offer some advice. Parents realize they are not alone.

## Home Time

Pick-up time also presents lots of opportunities for communication between caregivers, parents and children. Reminding the child, "Sally, you were a good friend to Emma today, helping her when she was afraid. I was very proud of you.", or mentioning to the parent, "Dad, come and see the skyscraper that Sam built today! We saved it to show you" are great ways to start conversations. It helps those parents who comment that when they ask their child what they did at nursery school today, the response is usually, "Nothing." It's a door opener that will often lead to the parent learning more about her/his child's day. Often the child will be more open to starting these conversations later at home.

## Celebrating Families

At our nursery school we have a large tree painted on the window separating two rooms. We ask parents to bring a family photo with their names on it to place on our family tree. Parents will often recognize another parent as someone that they went to school with or know from somewhere else. We have also enlisted everyone's help to make a book about our program. Each family contributes a page about their family and what they like about our program. We put them all together in a binder displayed where everyone can

see and read it. We try to include families in whatever way is most beneficial to everyone. Some parents love to come on field trips, some don't. Some parents have jobs that are interesting to children, invite them to share their expertise with the class. All families have different and interesting cultural backgrounds, and we often ask them if they would mind coming in one day to share their heritage. One of our families owned a horse farm and we made a field trip to their home which was fun. One of our families had a neighbour who emigrated from Australia. He was a great storyteller and had a wonderful collection of treasures and he kept the children, and the staff, mesmerized. Eighty families equal lots of opportunities for enrichment!

## Some Suggestions for Communicating with Parents

In a perfect world, with unlimited time, we could implement all of the following suggestions, whether in a half day program or full day child care. At our centre, do we do all of these things? We try. Have I forgotten some? Probably. Some days are easier than others and things go very smoothly and sometimes it just doesn't! I hope you can use or adapt some of these ideas into your program.

## Face-to-Face Communication

### With Parents

- Have at least one staff member whose primary role is to meet and greet parents and their children at drop-off time. At our centre, this position changes every two months, allowing parents to form relationships with individual staff and to provide continuity.
- OR assign families to specific staff members who will be the ones connecting with them most days.



- Ensure that the supervisor of the centre is available to have individual meetings with parents when there are concerns about their child.
- Ensure that we don't talk about the children in front of them, unless they are included in the conversation.
- Invite parents to come into the playroom during program time to observe and chat with the children and staff.
- Hold parent information nights. We introduce the staff members, talk about the program, and show a video that we have taken of the children over the first two months of the program. It's informal and offers an opportunity to talk to parents without the children present. It's also a chance to meet a parent whose work schedule doesn't allow for them to participate in the daily preschool routine. Offer children's programs so both children and their siblings can attend as well, to make it a family outing rather than another time when parents are not home with children.

- Family picnics, performances and concerts, Mother's Day Tea, muffin mornings are all special times to get together as a group. These events help to create a sense of community.
- Invite parents of children with special needs to come to one of your staff meetings to share information about their child that will help caregivers meet his or her special needs.

#### **With Early Childhood Educators**

- Hold weekly staff meetings to discuss the children. These meetings keep us up-to-date on any individual programming or family issues that are affecting the children and allows us to work together as a team, providing the child with consistent care. (We do these as a lunch meeting and it also keeps us connected with each other).

### **Other Types of Communication**

#### **With Parents**

- In addition to required forms on file, add an informal page, to be filled out by parents upon registration,

containing personal information such as how parents would describe their child's personality. Knowing any fears, special words used for bathroom routine, playmate's names etc...are all things that make communicating with a new child easier. This is especially useful for children with English as a Second Language or children who are non verbal.

- Jot down brief notes about something significant that happened regarding their child that day. Place it at the child's cubby for the parent to read when they pick their child up.
- Keep weekly planning sheets up-to-date and easily accessible. Remind parents to use them as a form of opening up conversation with their child.
- Post photographs of the children in action, and add captions that explain the development and learning that is occurring in various types of play experiences.
- Send home monthly calendars and newsletters, outlining themes, special events, trips, etc.



- When the drop-off didn't go so smoothly, we encourage parents to call after 30 minutes or so in order to check-in to see how their child is doing and ease their minds.
- Create a spot to post funny things that children say throughout the day. (We post these anonymously, but on the back note the child and date so that we can send them home at the end of the school year. Parents love this!).
- Have an information table with pamphlets readily available on topics that are of interest to parents, such as child development, sibling rivalry, etc. Change it periodically and leave a suggestion sheet for parents to write down topics that they might be interested in learning more about.
- Have a book borrowing library or one bookshelf where parents can sign-out parenting-related books.
- Keep a bulletin board with local upcoming events, workshops, and other activities of interest to families with young children.
- For parents of children with special needs or families who are dealing with temporary issues, we find it helpful to place notebooks in a child's backpack for communication between the child care centre and the family. This is a way to document routine happenings for nonverbal children and chart behaviour when parents request it. Parents read and respond via the notebook. Sometimes it isn't possible to talk face-to-face privately about such matters on a daily basis.
- Send home progress reports and copies of photos or art with captions demonstrating children's social, language, motor and cognitive development.
- Create year-end reports or portfolios for those graduating to the school system.
- Periodically send out evaluation sheets asking parents to provide feedback on the program, listing things they might

like to see added or things that they would like changed.

- When the nursery school is closed due to inclement weather, along with the local radio announcement, we personally call parents on our lists in case they missed the announcement. This takes time, but it adds a personal touch.
- Have a parenting workshop night with experts where parents can brainstorm and share thoughts and ideas on parenting issues.

### With Early Childhood Educators

- Maintain daybook entries with information that parents leave with the caregiver who greeted them that day.

## Saying Good-bye

Over the course of my career, I have met many wonderful families. It isn't uncommon to have a family be part of our nursery school for six or more years through three or more children. Several years ago, a dad was picking up his five year old son, whom we had known since birth, as his older sister

had attended before him. The father, knowing that he was nearing the end of his five times a week trek to our preschool program, commented, "My wife and I contemplated having another child just so that we could keep coming here!" Our program had become an extension of their home. Every June is bittersweet. On the last day of preschool there are always hugs and tears as we say good-bye to families who are not returning in the fall. While it is sad to see them leave, there is a sense of fulfillment in the relationships that were formed through our program and our regular supportive communication with families.

Evelyn Fletcher is an Early Childhood Educator at A Child's Place Preschool in Brantford, Ontario. She attended Conestoga College in Kitchener and upon graduating, worked at Western Day Care in London, Ontario. Evelyn moved back to Brantford after marrying her husband, Bob. She has two grown children and is proud to say that her daughter, Brooke, is the PhD student who co-wrote the preceding article! Evelyn is thankful to be part of the team from A Child's Place for over 20 years now and considers her co-workers, Lu-Ann, Linda, Nancy and Shelley to be her extended family. She also wishes to mention Corrie, Julie and Laurie from Lansdowne Children's Centre in Brantford, whose expertise and support make it possible to work in such an enriching environment. She especially wishes to thank Diane Bartle, the heart and soul of A Child's Place, for her leadership and her quest for us to keep enhancing our lives both professionally and personally!



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

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## Connecting Children to Nature – Part 2

# Greening Child Care

With greater awareness over how the environment impacts the health and well-being of the children and families it serves, there is a move toward green child care centres and preschools, and to getting children outside in nature. Many practitioners offer locally-grown or organic food, use non-toxic cleaners and art-supplies, recycle and reuse materials, compost and garden and move activities outdoors as much as possible — all in an effort to live in a sustainable way. Put simply, sustainability is the ability to create, use and maintain something indefinitely without having a net negative impact on the environment. This kind of practice, by default, provides a learning environment where children learn to respect the earth and its precious resources.

Early childhood practitioners have been the catalysts for social change many times in the past and we are poised to instigate real social change again, through sustainable practice. This focus section looks at how we can adapt our practice through simple, but unique approaches to greening our child care.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART 2  
GREENING CHILD CARE

# Pollinating our passion for the outdoors

**Working in a community of researchers, educators and children for natural landscapes**

**by Enid Elliot, Ph.D and Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, Ph.D**

Our project grew organically, responding to requests from educators who were interested in creating more natural spaces outdoors. An initial conversation with a centre concerned about the safety of their climber led to a small community of educators, researchers and children looking at the possibilities for more natural outdoor spaces. Along the way we discovered the value and potential of sharing information amongst researchers, educators and children.

As researchers we wanted to see how children engaged with the outdoors and also what educators did to enrich and encourage children's engagement with the natural world. Operating in a societal context where there is fear for children's safety, and pressures to focus on academic readiness and structured activities, early childhood centres struggle with society's lack of recognition of the importance of outdoor play. Licensing standards and playground catalogues have resulted in a uniformity in outdoor playgrounds; landscapes have been flattened, covered over with rubber matting, pea gravel and concrete (Elliott 2008).



As educators who go outside each day with the children, and as researchers who study the unlimited opportunities for engagement and learning for young children outdoors, we resisted and questioned the prevailing concern for safety and fear of the outdoors (Blanchet-Cohen, 2008; (Lester and Maudsley 2007). The programs that came together commonly recognized that the children enjoyed the outside space and gravitated to the natural elements available. In one centre it was a rock, another it was the wild area just beyond the fence, and in another it was the hillside with its grassy slopes. Each centre felt that the standard playground structures were inadequate, though each had a different vision of how to create a landscape that reflected the features of that particular place, including historical and cultural aspects. The First Nations program wanted to include cultural aspects in their outdoor



area, the centre for three to four year olds wanted to bring in elements of the rich forest space outside their fence, the infant program wanted to make the outdoors more accessible. Another wanted to spend as much time as possible outside and had children outside at the beginning of each day, rain or shine, cold or hot!

As researchers involved in children's rights and environmental education, we were excited to have an opportunity to think deeply about the outside space with the educators, and to involve young children in the process. This mingling and sharing of perspectives generated dialogues that both inspired educators' visions and provided sustenance for their continued efforts to reach out to modify their outdoor space, and to engage children in activities outdoors. Reflecting on our process, a few ingredients stood out.

The sharing of stories proved a powerful medium for conveying the significance of the outdoors for young children and educators. We heard stories from educators, as well as directly from children. These stories spoke to the sheer delight the outdoors provides children, as illustrated by the intensity and eagerness we heard in the young children's narratives and our observations of the more energetic physical movement and the involvement of all of the children's senses while outside. For example: "I love to run downhill and jump over the benches at the bottom"; "I love to jump from the top of the rock."

Children have an enormous curiosity and are intrigued with the transformations of nature that they experience. For

example, a "What happened to his wings?", "Where has the stream gone?" (referring to the winter time stream on a dry day in spring). We noted, and educators told us, that social interactions were also different outside, calmer and more focused. We noted that children used their creativity and

imagination outside working together to create spaces and plays. In the sand-box, for instance, children figured out how to share the space to create a fort, or in an open area how to move beach logs that took two or three children to lift.

Engaging with experts from other areas, such as landscape architects or environmental educators, helped us broaden our thinking and include different knowledge.

Despite the general pressure to provide climbing structures, research with children shows that they spend very little time on the playground equipment, and more time around and about the equipment (Herrington and Lesmeister 2006).

And while many of these measures have been put in place in the name of protection, studies indicate that injury levels in playgrounds with play equipment have not significantly been reduced (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Landscape architects shared their experience in design and expanded our own thinking on the range of possibilities, and how elements from the natural landscape can be incorporated into playgrounds.

Asking the children supported the educators' and our belief about the value of being outdoors for the children. Our discussions with the children helped us focus more closely on what was important to them. We asked the children's



**Despite the general pressure to provide climbing structures, research with children shows that they spend very little time on the playground equipment, and more time around and about the equipment**

(Herrington and Lesmeister 2006)





permission to share their information or videotape their discussions. For the most part, children were eager to tell us their ideas and thoughts about the outdoors. Educators began to discuss with us ways to document the children's interests. Just having the discussions had the effect of encouraging the educators to observe and note more closely the children's behaviour, which in turn led to more time being spent outside. As researchers we hoped to gain insights into the meaning of being outside and connecting with natural landscapes for the children and the educators. We did an interview with each program and following one interview an educator emailed us: "I have actually been thinking about the conversation I had with you and Natasha towards the end of November. More specifically the last question you asked: 'What I learn from the children when in a natural environment.' I think probably the greatest thing I learn from the children (or even the best thing I get from the children) is to have a sense of wonder and curiosity about what is around me."

In our discussions, we discovered that every program had a "secret" or "secrets" from licensing. During the research it became clear that educators' sense of agency is curtailed by licensing regulations. While engaging with the children in the outside space and enjoying the children's outdoor play, educators were always aware of whether or not they were transgressing regulations. "Safety" became a governing factor in their decisions with the children outside. The "secrets" from licensing became the educators' way of resisting the oppressiveness of the regulations, and asserting their competence. They made decisions based on their understanding of the children, of the environment and their own experience. Often, these contradicted the universality of regulations.

The regulations do not allow for the uniqueness of different locales or communities. The First Nations' wanted their outside setting to reflect cultural priorities and felt that licensing had no understanding of these priorities, and the importance of making their own decisions about the safety for their children. The other programs had similar reactions. Each felt they knew their children and could provide for their well-being, as well as opportunities for exploration and learning. Each program was articulate in explaining the

difficulties posed by licensing and their rationale to circumvent regulations when appropriate.

Other areas we uncovered were:

- Educators became collaborators with children in discovering and learning together.
- Educators enjoyed being outside and most of them mentioned special childhood memories of a natural space.
- Some educators connected spirituality with being outside.

Over time each program has made changes to their playground. The First Nations program has built a small long house, the infant/toddler program has added gentle hills to their grassy area and a large sandbox, the climber is gone from the 3-4 program—all were planning to make more changes.

We have also begun the discussion with licensing about the intent and application of regulations. With the experience and value of the group increasing, we are now presenting the observations that came out of our discussions with the four programs. Our learning community is growing. We receive feedback and stories from other programs and educators. A network has been created in our community through a listserv. To continue pollinating our passion, we hope to widen the network and connect with similar activities across Canada. Rachel Carson (1965) reminds us that "those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter." What a gift to give our children and ourselves.

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## CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART 2 GREENING CHILD CARE

# Getting Back to our Ancestral Heart

## Inviting Nature into the Child Care Environment

by Candice O’Grady

A week of rain, frigid lows, or smoggy heat produces a very particular energy amongst children. The treatment is generally straightforward: get outdoors. This is a reminder of the primordial heart that still beats in our chests. Children are fascinated by the elements that were, for the vast majority of human history, critical to our survival—quite simply, nature. Before children are socialized into valuing the synthetic over the natural, the technological over the organic, they make that choice instinctively. They choose to crouch in the grass rather than lounge on concrete, or to tromp through the park in place of circle games in the gym.

This instinctive connection to nature should be nurtured

and encouraged in children. We face unprecedented crises—climate change, peak oil, mass extinction—precisely because we have lost sight of our interdependence with local ecosystems. Communities are built roughshod over plant and animal habitats. Human consumption continues to increase with rampant disregard for its effects on air, water and soil. “Cabin fever” is not some anomaly in childhood behavior, but a reminder of the strong intuitive connection that we all have with the planet.

Child care providers are uniquely positioned to foster this relationship, to grow a generation of children more conscious of their link to the land. It begins with modest changes in daily lessons. Developing a curriculum that enhances our children’s connection to the natural world need not be complex. The following paragraphs, inspired by a system of design called Permaculture, will explore simple and low-cost techniques for infusing everyday activities with an ethic of care for the earth.

### Greening the Child Care Environment

Improving our relationship with the natural world means inviting more of it into our daily lives and requires interacting intimately with plants and animals on a regular basis. The





goal is to become familiar with local flora and fauna – to recognize individual species in a field, or sprouting out of a cleft in the sidewalk, to know its rhythms and seasons. With knowledge, the vastness of plant and animal life inspires wonder, rather than confusion.

One basic way to bring more of nature into child care is to green your location. Start with the place where you and the children spend most of your time—your nucleus of activity—then radiate outwards. For our purposes this would likely be a room in a school, centre or home. Imagine ways to increase the efficiency of that space. Here are some suggestions:

#### **1) Introduce a composting system for food waste**

Introduce children to their place in the foodchain as well as concepts of soil building, plant growth, fertility, gardening and care for the earth with vermicompost bins (lidded containers with worms inside that chomp their weight in food waste each day) that can be kept inside, outdoor aerated bins, or a big heap out back. See the

**Child care providers, like teachers and parents, are uniquely positioned to accelerate natural succession towards daily systems that build on ecosystem health. Each simple activity holds the potential to impel enduring and widespread change.**

Composting Council of Canada ([www.compost.org](http://www.compost.org)) for more information.

#### **2) Garden your classroom**

Replacing regular light bulbs with full-spectrum bulbs will ensure that plants have enough light to thrive. Fill up the windowsills with edible and medicinal seedlings, grow small trees along one wall, plant a flower patch in another corner of the room, and teach children about the functions of different species while improving indoor air quality. See [www.kidsgardening.com](http://www.kidsgardening.com) for more information (especially the container gardening section).

#### **3) Use natural cleansers**

Tea tree oil, vinegar, lemon and baking soda are powerful natural cleansers that provide

a platform for teaching kids about hygiene and the special properties of certain plants and minerals. In addition to being unnecessary, chemicals like bleach, cause as much harm to the environment in production as they can to humans in application. See [www.care2.com](http://www.care2.com) for non-toxic cleaning recipes, (the article “5 Simple Alternatives to Toxic Cleaning Products” provides a good foundation).

#### **4) Animals**

Introduce children to household pets, start an aquarium or a terrarium, take a field trip to a neighbouring farm. If you have the means, hatching chicks or ducklings is a highly engaging way to demonstrate incubation and birth.

### **Energy Cycling**

Greening the child care environment provides fodder for countless activities. Switching to natural cleansers, for example, facilitates children’s participation in cleaning. This may provide an incentive for keeping a tidy space, and foster a sense of pride for their part in it. Similarly, collecting scraps for the compost, adding water if necessary, turning it, watching the worms do their



work, looking for eggs, or collecting soil to scatter around seeds, provides a daily routine of activities. It instills a sense of agency in natural processes. Also, the compost itself provides materials for future activities—soil for a window-ledge bean bed, or an outdoor vegetable plot, or something unique to sell as a fundraiser.

This web of constantly renewing activities is called “energy cycling,” and it occurs when energy is caught, held and stored within a system, rather than draining out of it. This is a highly desirable arrangement because all it requires is the initial input of creativity, planning and materials, which will then be recycled indefinitely.

Here is another example. You decide to plant beans with your children. This is a singular activity. However, everyday each child is responsible for checking on her bean seed, for watering it, and rotating it towards the light. Sometimes you take the beans outside for fresh air, and every few days the children do sketches (or finger paintings) of their seedlings to track their growth. You read stories about gardening, soil, plant growth, worms and pollinating insects (see [www.gardenjane.com](http://www.gardenjane.com) for a book list), then ask the children to create a bean story of their own, compiling their artwork into a book. When the beans sprout, as they generally do, the children can then harvest, clean and eat them. At the end of the meal, they return their scraps to the compost bin, and the cycle begins again.

All of these activities stem from the original act of sowing a seed. Organic undertakings are renewable resources, they are self-sustaining like the cycle of life itself. The output of energy that you and your children invest in planting seeds returns to you continually in the form of hands-on activities. Imagine the potential of a kitchen garden or an herb patch!

## Stacking Functions and Beneficial Outcomes

Gardening, including composting achieves numerous goals at once, a design feature called stacking functions. It means that a single right action (an activity promoting ecosystem health) serves multiple purposes and results in many beneficial outcomes.

For example, harvesting heirloom tomatoes from the garden for the lunch table also provides opportunities to teach about food production and soil health. Caring for the plants is the source of innumerable hands-on activities. Extra fruit can be sold to neighbours as a fundraiser, or used to host a picnic where everyone brings a tomato-based dish. At the end of

the season, tomato seeds can be traded for some cucumber or squash.

The most straightforward example of stacking functions, however, is spending time outside everyday. Many children and adults alike suffer from chronic low-grade cabin fever. We all benefit from spending time outdoors. No matter what the weather, make sure kids come prepared to explore and burst through those doors. You and your children will necessarily interact more intimately with your community if you are outside.

- 1) To provide children with exercise, anticipated change within a routine, and time for free, imaginative play - eat outside, do drama games and explore.
- 2) Provide innumerable teaching opportunities about natural processes; when kids spot a squirrel tell a story about collecting nuts or building nests from leaves.
- 3) Collect materials for crafts and games: maple leaves, walnuts, chestnuts, birch bark, oak twigs, wild flowers, stones, feathers, long grass, willow switches, fern fronds.
- 4) Do bark rubbings to identify different kinds of trees.
- 5) Press leaves and flowers and make a book of local flora.
- 6) Plant an edible garden. Involve children in the entire process.
- 7) Mark the passing seasons with your own rituals. Spending time outdoors throughout the year enhances our connection to the earth's cycle of fertility.

For more ideas visit [www.gardenjane.com](http://www.gardenjane.com), [www.evergreen.org](http://www.evergreen.org), [www.cityfarmer.org](http://www.cityfarmer.org).

## Childcare Providers, the Pioneer Species

Incorporating nature into our daily routines is inspiring. To borrow the language of Permaculture, it requires bringing back our plant allies and awakening the creative, intuitive self. Child care providers, like teachers and parents, are uniquely positioned to accelerate natural succession towards daily systems that build on ecosystem health. Each simple activity holds the potential to impel enduring and widespread change. You are the pioneer species, the hardy plants that root first, making the land livable for those that follow. You have the capacity to help establish more sustainable, productive and ecologically grounded communities one child at a time.

Candice O'Grady is a Toronto native and former staff member of the CCCF. She is currently a write-at-home mom living in New York City with her husband, Julian, and her daughter, Violet.



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART 2  
GREENING CHILD CARE

## Aniingngualaurtaa – Let's Play Outside – Nunavik

**Drawing on the wisdom of Elders, the priorities of parents, the knowledge of educators and the choices of children to design and develop a made-in Nunavik approach to being outside with young children.**

**by Mary Caroline Rowan, Annie Nulukie and Margaret Gauvin**

During the August 2000 Nunavik Elders conference a resolution was passed which mandated Avataq Cultural Institute to develop culturally relevant Inuktitut language materials and resources to be used in the child care centres of Nunavik, Quebec. Situated in the top third of the province of Quebec, Nunavik is made up of fourteen Inuit communities which are nestled along the shores of Ungava Bay, Hudson's Bay and the Hudson straight. About 10,000 Inuit live in Nunavik. Inuktitut is spoken in most homes and is the primary teaching language in the child care centres and in the schools up to Grade three.

Kativik Regional Government (KRG) is a public organization with wide mandates including child care in Nunavik. Under a Quebec agreement, KRG currently regulates, licenses, funds, supervises and supports the 14 licensed Centre de Petites Enfance (CPE) which operate in Nunavik. KRG is concerned with ensuring that the child care regulations are met within a context that is linguistically and culturally meaningful for young children and their families.



**“We believe that children have the right to care that is culturally and linguistically appropriate, incorporating the values and traditions of their parents and community.”**

— Avataq Elders Meeting, Akulivik, August 2000

In 2006 KRG asked Avataq to start planning a new curriculum guide – one designed to support Educators in taking children outside. KRG staff members were concerned that Inuit children, whose ancestors grew up playing outside, were spending too much time indoors. Hence, phase 1 of the Aniingngualaurtaa – Let's Play Outside project began, and the approach “tested.”

In January 2008, the planning session began with the childhood memory workshop. The childhood memory workshop involved inviting each participant to reflect on a favorite childhood experience from out of doors, to paint a picture about the memory, to share the story with the group, and then reflect on the meaning of the memory - its value.





The workshop is a powerful way for adults to reflect on their own values about children and childhood and was inspired by an article written by Eileen Hughes (2007) about work with the Chevak people of Alaska. During the session KRG staff came up with six main belief statements:

*We believe in the power of doing physical activities out of doors.*

*We believe in the strength of awareness.*

*We believe in family.*

*We believe in nature as the source of our being.*

*We believe that culture is based in nature.*

*We believe that Inuit history is the foundation.*

Buoyed by an understanding about the strength of the Inuit connection to nature and the out of doors drawn from reflection on the meaning of individual outdoor memory stories, the group proceeded to plan the framework of the Let's Play Outside project and the first community visit.

## Project goals and objectives

The purpose of the Aniingngualaurtaa – Let's play outside project is to develop a meaningful approach to an outdoor nature curriculum grounded in Inuit knowledge and designed to inspire Inuit educators, children and parents.

There are five main objectives.

1. To get young children, educators and family especially in Nunavik childcare centers programs to play outside.
2. To inspire educators, children and family to appreciate the base of nature in Inuit culture.
3. To include activities for a variety of places including: in the playground, in the community, on the land, and by the water.
4. To provide advice and direction concerning the supervision and safety of children out of doors.
5. To draw on knowledge of elders, educators, parent's and



**These childhood memory stories were reproduced on glossy cardboard and distributed in a binder to every child care centre in Nunavik.**

children to develop the materials and approach.

## Inukjuak Community Visit

### Childhood Memory Stories

The Inukjuak community visit involved meeting with educators, elders, parents and children. Twenty-nine educators, trainees, board members and administrators joined in the two Childhood Memory workshops.

Participants used acrylic paint to create pictures of outdoor childhood memories about activities including sliding, berry picking, and boating. They then shared their stories with the group and discussed the importance of the stories. Points raised included: a sense of safety, feelings of freedom, sharing, having fun with parents, eating fresh meat and sea food – healthy food, about learning traditional ways, appreciating nature and about having no worries – just being free. Future community visits will include reflecting on these value statements and considering ways to incorporate them into work with children at the centre. Following the session, the educator's painting, childhood memory story

and photo were assembled on a story board. These childhood memory stories were reproduced on glossy cardboard and distributed in a binder to every child care centre in Nunavik.

### Elder Session

The elder's session took place in a traditional sod house called a hummock, on a cold February day. Five elders all members of Pukik, the Local Cultural Committee met with 12 Educator trainees in a session facilitated by Annie Nulukie from KRG. The elders remembered making soccer balls from snow and ice and playing outside all day after their chores were done. One chore involved dropping in on the neighbours to say hello. The elders spoke about raising puppies, playing tag, acting out familial roles, and playing in old igloos known as igloovigaq. When the elders were asked how children learn, the reply was that, 'children learn by watching and observing'. Before the session ended the elders articulated how they wanted to spend time with the children at the daycare, and to show children how to make buckets and sleds with ice. The elder session was recorded and highlights of the session have



been translated and will be used in creating a DVD with elder's voices from many Nunavik communities.

### Community Radio Show

Seventeen Inukjuamiut (people of Inukjuak) phoned into the radio show which was recorded and transferred to CD and transcribed to text. Callers were invited to share childhood memories. One spoke about big toddlers starting to walk when they could finally be placed on the ground at the end of the cold winter. The records of the radio show will be used as reference materials for the development of the project materials.

### Input from Children

Stephanie Pov, a KRG team member, visited Innalik School where the Kindergarten children drew pictures of outdoor experiences. The intent is to find out about what children like to do outside. The three and four year old day care children were also provided with paints and encouraged to think about things outside.

In reflecting on the experience at Tasiurvik Child Care Centre in Inukjuak, Annie Nulukie noted the dynamic differences between the stories told by adults and children. She explained, "One boy told about how he enjoys playing hockey and motorcycling with his Dad". Another child scribbled and scribbled all over the page and explained that his picture showed the windy and stormy weather which was why he did not want to go outside. Annie noted, "We will have to take the children's feelings and experiences into consideration as we put the program together." Future community visits may involve children capturing photos of favorite outdoor activities and truly drawing on the input and voices of the children as detailed in the work of Alison Clark and Peter Moss (2005, 2006).

### Lessons Learned

Organizers learned that the Childhood memory workshop is a powerful tool that can be used to stimulate childhood memories and lead participants to define values related to young children and the out of doors. Every Inukjuak educator agreed to make



**The purpose of the Aniingngualaurtaa – Let's Play Outside project is to develop a meaningful approach to an outdoor nature curriculum grounded in Inuit knowledge and designed to inspire Inuit educators, children and parents.**

their photo, painting and story available for public use. At the annual Nunavik Director's meeting, a request was made to distribute copies of the Inukjuak Childhood Memory stories and to travel with the workshop to every centre in Nunavik. Perhaps one of the best things learned was that the Inukjuak elders and Pukik members are interested in spending time at the child care centre with the children and the educators. They would like to demonstrate how to make things like ice buckets, sleds and soccer balls. Elders also enjoyed home visits and encouraged visiting.

Phase 1 of the Aniingngualaurtaa project was realized within a two month period due to the excellent collaboration of the KRG team composed of Annie Nulukie, Stephanie Pov and Valerie Giroux, who worked together with the consultant Carol Rowan, Tasiurvik Child Care Centre

board, administration and staff, as well as the Pukik Cultural committee to enable completion of the many pieces of this project.

### Next Steps

Phase 2 has now begun. The plan is that within the next two years members of the KRG team will visit the day care centres in Nunavik with the Childhood Memory Workshop. The team will adjust the methodology described in this article in order to draw on the wisdom of Elders, the priorities of parents, the knowledge of Educators and the choices of children to design and develop a made-in Nunavik approach to being outside with young children.

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## CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART 2 GREENING CHILD CARE

# Back Yard Project

**Developing an Appreciation  
of Nature by Living, Growing,  
Re-using and Recycling at  
Sonshine Daycare**

**by Denine McCormack with factual  
help from Kathleen Carlsen**

Sonshine Daycare began its journey into the world of recycling when Kathleen and Jim Carlsen purchased and began operating the centre in 2000. They were on a pretty tight budget and had so many things they wanted to do to make the outdoors a wondrous place, so recycling used materials was the way to go. They wanted the children to look forward to going outdoors to play, to develop an appreciation of nature, and to explore it using their five senses. They also wanted children to have the opportunity to take risks, to problem solve and to discover how things work while their bodies move. Chrissie Handrahan, the current owner/operator continues this approach to nurture the children's love of nature at Sonshine Daycare.

### Tree of Life

Creative minds are often hard at work in this natural building site which consists of a great climbing tree that use to be at a family member's house, a stone foundation from an old abandoned house, some left over pieces of wooden fence posts, slices of logs, large rocks from around the maritime provinces, some sawdust and pea gravel. Planning and resourcefulness were key components to this building project.



### Underground economy

This constructed hill provides lots of opportunity for children of all ages and abilities to challenge themselves, develop their muscles, and take small risks.







It began as a pile of dirt brought in to cover up the tunnel, which was formerly a fish storage tank from the Vet College at UPEI. A slide was added (taken from an old climber no longer in use) and then finished with sand stone climbing steps that were taken from the old foundation. The children enjoyed the challenge of trying to walk up the hill on their own, so an old piece of rope was attached to the house, to give the children another way to haul themselves up.

### Composting with worms

A worm brings such delight to this little girl. In the winter the children and staff started a worm farm. They learned all about worms, what they eat, what their job is, and how they contribute to the environment by composting food scraps.



The children saved waste from the centre to feed the worms. They watched and helped as the worm compost increased and the worms multiplied. They also used the compost to fill up their vegetable and flower boxes, (recycled cement forms donated by a cement company) for the plants and seeds they grew in the summer. The worm farm gives the children such a meaningful introduction to the cycle of life and the benefits of composting, and shows them the role and responsibility they have to keep the cycle going as they gain awareness of how all living things have a purpose.

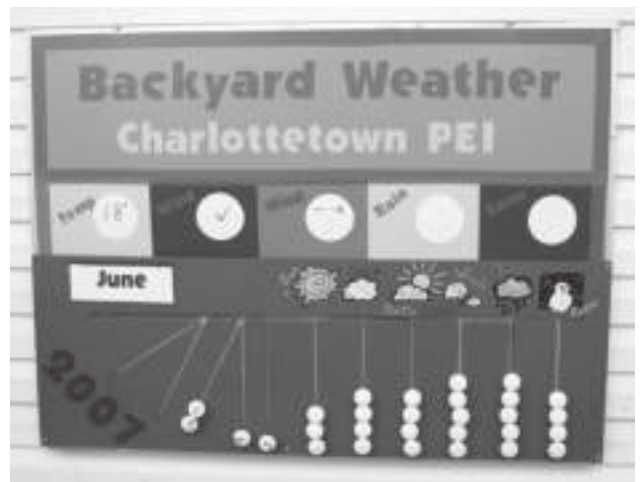
### A-Maze the children

Old tires can have many uses – you just need an imagination to come up with them. How about a large scale ball maze? Simply cut a tire, stretch it out vertically and attach it to some plumbing pipe. Then add a piece of wood to hold the bottom tire steady and it is ready for balls, cars, trucks, water, and anything else that slides. Physics at its beginning stages!



### We'll weather the weather

Weather is an important topic of conversation for all ages on PEI. The weather can change in a matter of moments: it could be snowing, raining, freezing rain, and ice pellets all in a morning. The children take the opportunity to talk about the weather inside and record it on their way outside to the backyard. The weather chart can track a month of weather and provide many opportunities for family conversation.







## CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE – PART 2 GREENING CHILD CARE

# Building a Tree Circle

**A project excerpted from Rusty Keeler's new book: *Natural Playscapes – Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul***  
[www.earthplay.net](http://www.earthplay.net)

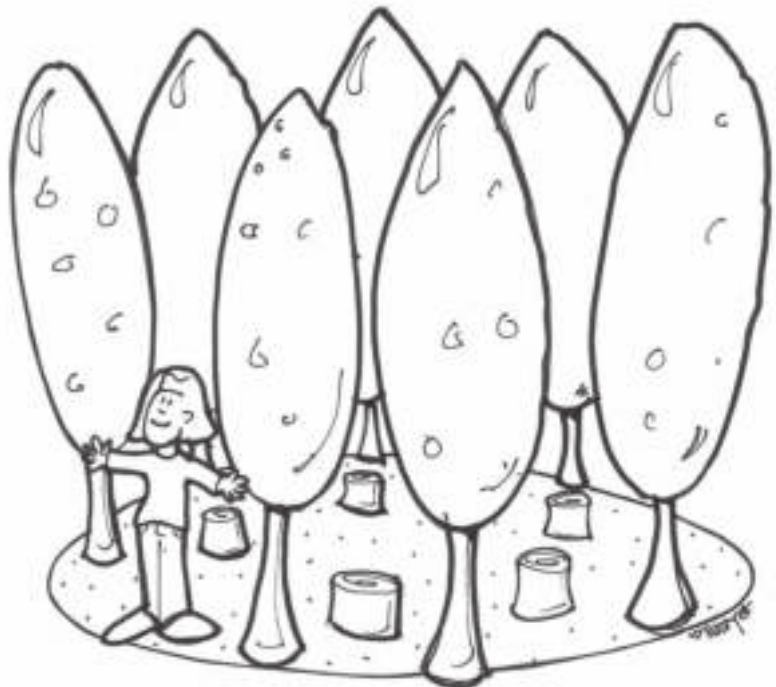
If you are dreaming of adding nature to your yard this project may be perfect for you. The Tree Circle is a green gathering area for children made by planting trees in a circle. For children, the Tree Circle becomes a magical place for dramatic play, quiet retreat, or lively nature exploration. For teachers and parents it becomes a shady grove for snacks and stories. The trees create a sweet spot that changes during the seasons and grows over time. A beautiful addition to a child's life —and yours too!

*To begin, put together a “beautification team” of excited volunteers wanting to help. Do you people who know about plants or have planted trees before? Got any friends or staff with a green thumb (and a strong back!) This team will be the folks who make design decisions, select the trees, and plant the trees. Local plant nurseries, landscapers, and landscape architects can answer questions or offer advice. They may even donate some time or trees if you ask nicely.*

Here are the basic steps:

1. **Decide where to plant the Tree Circle**—Think about sunlight and where you want shade. Make sure to pick a spot where your trees will have room to grow. Ask your team to help you decide.

2. **Select what kind of trees**—Dwarf fruit trees and smaller ornamental trees stay more “child-sized” as they grow and will have beautiful flowers in springtime. Evergreen trees create a tree circle with a whole different set of sensory experiences. Plant native trees that are indigenous to your area.
3. **Decide on size**—Think of the Tree Circle as a room. How many children do you want to fit inside? What kinds of play activities do you want to have room for in this outside room? Create a space that feels cozy but also gives the treetops room to grow together. The tree circle may someday look like a living gazebo when the shady treetops grow together!
4. **Decide on number of trees**—When you know the size and shape, sprinkle flour on the ground in the shape of your circle to help you visualize the new space. How many trees will fit around your circle? Depending on the size, some tree circles can have six or eight trees; others may have only three or four trees. Any number is fine. Be sure to leave a space open with no trees on one side to create a fun entrance. Which way should it face?
5. **Imagine benches and ground cover**—Use whatever resources and materials you have available. Benches can be made from things such as straw bales, tree stumps, whole logs, smooth boulders etc. The ground cover inside the tree circle can be grassy or covered with wood chips. Think about the mood and sensory experiences you want to create inside the space...





6. **Get your trees**—Does anyone on your team know a landscape person or someone who works at a plant nursery? They can help you get your trees. They will also be able to tell you the best way to plant and maintain the trees. Ask for discounts or free delivery. (send a thank-you note afterwards!)
7. **Plant your trees**—Planting the tree circle can probably happen on a weekend afternoon with a small team or workers armed with shovels and smiles. Pick a day on the calendar, invite anybody who wants to help, arrange to have the trees delivered, and you are on your way! (Remember to provide snacks and drinks for volunteers) With more flour on the ground, mark out where each tree should go and start your volunteers digging! Follow the nursery-person's directions on how deep the trees should be planted and be sure to clip off any low "poking" branches. When all the trees are in the ground be sure to have everybody sit inside for a picture!
8. **Install extras**—Bring in your ground cover material and benches. Add things like wind chimes, birdhouses, or birdfeeders for added fun and discovery.

The trees in your tree circle are living beings that grow and change over time. Like children, they need love and care. With the right gentle attention your tree circle will mature into a beautiful natural space for your children. What a great place to play...

*Ps. Please send me pictures of your Tree Circle! Rusty@earthplay.net*

## RESEARCH UPDATES

### Best Interests of the Child: Meaning and Application in Canada - Report

The Best Interests of the Child is a central principle in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A new report, released by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, explores how this principle has been used, misused, and under-used in the context of Canadian policy and practice. The report, entitled *Best Interests of the Child: Meaning and Application in Canada*, proposes a rights-based approach for application in a wide variety of areas. Based on research and a national, multi-disciplinary conference, the report hopes to foster reflection in Canada on how well we are living up to our commitment to act in the best interests of children. Available online at: [www.rightsofchildren.ca](http://www.rightsofchildren.ca)



### Active Kids Score Higher: More Activity Time Adds Up to Better Learning

Key findings from the 2009 Report Card show that, "being active feeds the brain, giving active kids an academic advantage over their peers who are more sedentary," according to Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada.

Disturbing though, the Report Card gives most Canadian children a failing grade for Physical Activity Levels, with only 13% of Canadian kids getting the recommended 90 minutes of physical activity a day, that's just a 4 four percent increase from 2006. The Report Card also assigns an F for Screen Time, as 90% of Canadian children are still spending too much time in front of television, computer and video screens. For more information and to access the 2009 Report Card, see [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)





## Canadian Supplement to the 2009 UNICEF State of the World's Children report: *Aboriginal children's health: Leaving no child behind*

The report examines the health of Aboriginal children in Canada, in partnership with the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health and through the perspectives of national experts, and concludes that health disparities among First Nations, Inuit and Métis children relative to other Canadians are a major children's rights challenge for our country. Aboriginal children fall well below most national average indicators of health and well-being compared with other Canadian children. More information regarding the report can be accessed at [www.unicef.ca/leavingnochildbehind](http://www.unicef.ca/leavingnochildbehind) in English and [www.unicef.ca/pourtouslesenfants](http://www.unicef.ca/pourtouslesenfants) in French.



## ACROSS CANADA AND BEYOND

### National

#### Early Learning and Child Care Act – Bill C-373

The New Democratic Party has reintroduced the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* in Parliament. On April 29, 2009 NDP Child Care Critic Olivia Chow reintroduced the proposed legislation (Bill C-373) in the House of Commons. The bill was introduced once before in May of 2006 as Bill C-303 and had passed first and second reading before Parliament was dissolved for the October 2008 election. Bill C-373 lays the foundation for a national child care system governed by principles and accountability. It calls for accessible, universal and high-quality early learning and child care programs and services

### Senate report

In April, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology released a report entitled *Early Childhood Education and Care: Next Steps*. Among the recommendations of the Senate report was the need to appoint a minister of state for children and youth with responsibilities to work with provincial and territorial governments to advance quality early learning and child care. It also recommends the federal government conduct a series of meetings of federal, provincial and territorial ministers with responsibility for children and youth to establish a pan-Canadian framework to provide policies and programs to support children and their families.

#### Private Member's Bill: A national Children's Commissioner for Canada

On June 11, 2009 Marc Garneau, Liberal Member of Parliament tabled his first Private Member's Bill (C-418) which aims to ensure that Canadian children have a voice thanks to the establishment of a national Children's Commissioner. A federal Children's Commissioner will promote, monitor and report on the effective implementation of Canada's obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child that are within the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada, in order to advance the principle that children are entitled to special safeguards, care and assistance, including appropriate legal protections. That work will include engaging children in order to ensure that their voices are heard.

### Alberta

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, the Alberta government officially began allocating \$12.6 million from the child care budget to expand the child care accreditation program to licensed out-of-school care programs. Accreditation gives parents with children needing care before and after school an additional tool to help them identify programs with standards of excellence over and above Alberta's regulated requirements. The Out-of-School Care Accreditation program is part of Alberta's *Creating Child Care Choices* plan. This plan was put in place to help communities create 14,000 new child care spaces by 2011.

Alberta's child care accreditation program is the only one of its kind in Canada. Introduced to licensed day cares and approved family day home agencies, this voluntary program has now been tailored to work for the out-of-school care sector.

### British Columbia

Only one out of 10 British Columbians with kids is happy about the affordability of daycare, a new poll has found. In fact, British Columbians are generally less happy with their education and health care systems than other Canadians, according to results of the poll, conducted by Angus Reid Strategies. Only 13 per cent of British Columbians with children said the affordability of daycare is good or very good, compared with 31 per cent of Canadians. Only 32 per cent of B.C. parents say the overall quality of daycare is good or very good. In the rest of Canada, more than half feel child care is of good quality.

But the biggest perceived shortcoming is in educating children with special needs. While 35 per cent of Canadian parents are pleased with access to special education, only 22 per cent of B.C. residents feel the same way. And while 31 per cent of Canadians are satisfied with services for children with special needs, only 25 per cent of British Columbians are satisfied. Angus Reid Strategies surveyed 7,000 Canadians – including 1,000 from B.C. – online from May 20 to 26

### Manitoba

The Government of Manitoba announced in the April 1st budget an increase of 3% to overall revenue for program operating



budgets including centres and family child care.

The Province has launched six new initiatives and is also adding 19 new child care sites, and funding another 2,850 child care spaces. The Province will continue to support Family Choices: Manitoba's Five Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care including a Child Care Safety Charter, development of a curriculum framework, more funded spaces, new child care sites and an extensive recruitment and retention program.

Manitoba also announced a Family Choices Building Fund of 7.9 Million for 2009-2010 to build new sites and renovate and expand existing sites with the goal of opening 23 new sites by 2013.

## New Brunswick

The New Brunswick government committing financial support to achieve pay equity for five private-sector employee groups, including child care workers, starting in 2010-11. The minister announced that the next group of private-sector employees to begin the process toward implementing and achieving pay equity will be human service workers in community residences serving children and adults with significant need. The provincial government will support these groups with pay equity adjustments beginning in the next fiscal year, pending the results of those job evaluation processes. The pay equity processes are being followed with these groups, Minister Mary Schryer announced. "By focusing on these groups, we have prioritized female-dominated occupations that take care of the most vulnerable in our society - our children, our elderly, our adults with significant needs, and victims of violence."

## Newfoundland

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is creating a new department responsible for child, youth and family services in Newfoundland and Labrador. Child Care Services will now fall under this new department with Minister Joan Burke. Budget 2009 includes an investment of \$8.5 million for increased support and resources to the child, youth and family services system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Nova Scotia

In March, 2009, the Government of Nova Scotia announced that the family income cutoff to be eligible for provincial daycare

subsidies has been increased to \$62,000 from \$55,000. In addition, the minimum daily fee a parent will pay for subsidized child care has been lowered to \$1 from \$2.25.

At that time, Community Services Minister Judy Streach announced \$5 million in programming for this year, through the Early Learning and Child-Care Plan. The grant will also help day cares cover general operating expenses. The announcement also includes an education assistance program aimed at training and retaining early childhood educators. Over the next eight years, the plan is to invest almost \$45 million in further initiatives.

## Ontario

The Early Learning Advisors' Report on Full Day Early Learning was released June 15 by Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty. Charles Pascal's, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* recognizes the valuable role early childhood educators play in the early learning and care of Ontario's children. Pascal envisions public schools as neighbourhood hubs offering pre-natal and parenting information, nutrition counselling, after-school programs and flexible child care for children up to eight. Schools would be open from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., 50 weeks a year, and offer fee-based activities during breaks and summer vacation. These services would be widely available and open to all those involved in the care of young children, not just to families who utilize full-day learning programs.

McGuinty has committed \$500 million to the plan over two years beginning in 2010 - just under half the amount Pascal recommended. He also rebuked teachers' unions for their critical reaction to the most controversial component - the proposal to offer full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

## Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island will offer a full-day public kindergarten program in Island schools starting September 2010. Following the release of public Kindergarten Commissioner, Pat Mella's report in the spring, Premier Robert Ghiz advised that government has endorsed the direction of the report. Existing kindergarten teachers will be considered first for the new teaching positions in the school system. The play-based curriculum that was recently developed by Island kindergarten educators will continue to be used. The curriculum is based on the philosophy that five-year-olds learn through play, and that they

can best learn skills and concepts through active exploration, discovery and hands-on involvement.

## Quebec

Proposed provincial government legislation that would govern home-based daycares was criticized by union leaders in June for failing to provide pay equity to Quebec's 14,000 home-based child care providers. Home-based daycare workers - who won the right to unionize last November - have been fighting for fair wages and working conditions for more than nine years. Bill 51, if passed unamended, would exclude the mainly female workers from provincial government pay equity provisions and, at the same time, create a new bureaucracy to oversee the \$7-a-day home-based daycares.

## Saskatchewan

In March 2009 budget, the Government of Saskatchewan announced 1000 more child care spaces this fiscal year. Although this only brings the total number of licensed spaces in Saskatchewan to 11,400, it is the single largest increase in one year. Other budget announcements included a 3 % increase to support recruitment and retention. Funding for these new spaces includes \$3,360.00 per space for capital costs (construction, renovation), an additional \$615.00 per space in start up funds for the purchase of furnishings and equipment and \$246.00 per space to purchase materials to enhance the learning environment. In August, the province allocated an additional 370 new child-care spaces as part of its previous pledge to boost the number of licensed spots for kids.

Twelve agencies will be receiving \$1.24 million in capital funding to develop the new child-care spaces in 10 communities.

# CALENDAR

## OCTOBER

21-23

Toronto, Ontario

**Home Child Care Association of Ontario - The Business of Taking Care of Others . . . and You!**

Dynamic speakers will present interactive workshops on the ELECT, Conflict Mediation, Surviving the Sandwich Generation and more! Provider Professional Development Day Saturday October 24, 2009. Plenary sessions will engage





providers in interactive workshops on topics to support them in the successful management of their business to provide quality care to children. Visit: [www.hccao.com](http://www.hccao.com)

24<sup>th</sup>

#### Prince George, British Columbia

##### BC Family Child Care Association Conference 2009

Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education BCFCCA in partnership with PGCCA is having a one day conference. Visit [www.bcfcca.ca](http://www.bcfcca.ca) for more information.

## NOVEMBER

12-13

#### Quebec City, Quebec

##### Ready for School, Ready for Life

Co-organized by the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development, this event will raise awareness of observed factors in early childhood that determine or influence school readiness. It will also highlight assessed practices that support children's school readiness and success. Information for this event will be available at [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca).

16-18

#### Winnipeg, Manitoba

##### The early development imperative: A pan-Canadian conference on population level measurement of children's development

Sponsored by the Council for Early Child Development in partnership with the Human Early Learning Partnership, the Offord Centre for Child Studies and Healthy Child Manitoba, this conference will highlight initiatives across the country to better understand and address inequities in our children's development.

19-21

#### Vancouver, British Columbia

##### The Circle of Care: It Takes a Community

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Provincial Training Conference of the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. Visit [www.acc-society.bc.ca](http://www.acc-society.bc.ca)

20<sup>th</sup>

#### National Child Day

## FEBRUARY 2010

04-06

#### Victoria, British Columbia

##### The Early Years Conference 2010: the Rights of the Child

The conference will explore early childhood, family and community development through the lens of Child Rights visit [www.interprofessional.ubc.ca/Early\\_Years\\_2010.html](http://www.interprofessional.ubc.ca/Early_Years_2010.html).

## MAY 2010

27-28

#### Montreal, Quebec

##### 2010 Canadian Child Care Conference

Co-hosted with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Quebec. Details coming soon: [qualitychildcarecanada.ca](http://qualitychildcarecanada.ca)

## RESOURCES

### Teaching Children to Appreciate Nature and Friendship - *Emily the Chickadee* series

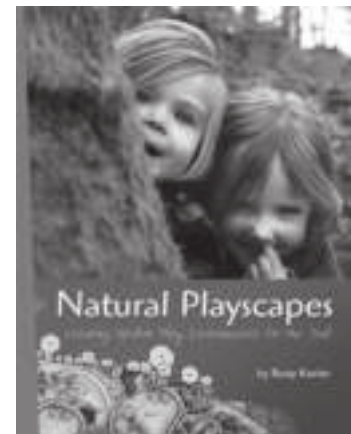
Author Carol Zelaya is working to help young children appreciate the beauty of nature with her *Emily the Chickadee* series. The series is based on Zelaya's true experiences at her home near Portland, Oregon. *Emily the Chickadee* is written in easy-reading rhyme, illustrating how nests are made, eggs are hatched into birds, how the mother bird feeds her young and how children can care for birds and other animals by providing water, food and shelter. In the first book of her series, *Emily Waits for her Family*, the little girl meets Emily, the chickadee, in her backyard and watches in amazement as she builds a nest to raise her family of chicks. *Caring for Emily's Family*, the second book of the series, follows Emily and her chickadee family as they settle into a permanent home in the little girl's backyard. The final book of the series, *Emily's New Home*, the little girl is forced to move to a new home and Emily follows the little girl and surprises her by building a nest in the wreath of her new front door. For more information visit [www.emilythechickadee.com](http://www.emilythechickadee.com).

### About Canada: Childcare

Co-authored by CRRU director Martha Friendly and University of Manitoba Sociologist Susan Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare* answers questions about early childhood education and childcare (ECEC) in Canada. Why doesn't Canada have an ECEC system, even though other countries do? Why is ECEC so important? What is missing in Canada's ECEC landscape and why? Can ECEC programs be designed as wonderful environments for young children or are they merely necessary but not particularly desirable places to keep children safe while mothers are at work? Is ECEC primarily a public good, a private family responsibility or an opportunity for profit-making? Early childhood education and childcare is a political issue, the authors argue, and Canada needs an integrated system of services. Early Childhood Education students will get the big picture on ECEC issues, politics and policy in Canada. Published May 2009. Available for \$17.95 at [www.fernwoodpublishing.ca](http://www.fernwoodpublishing.ca).

### Natural Playscapes: Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul

In this colorful book by Rusty Keeler, you will find the steps and the inspiration to create your own incredible outdoor play spaces no matter how large or small. Tucked in the chapters, is advice for every situation or climate — whether you are designing a playscape for your school, child care centre, park, or your own backyard. From simple to elaborate, the pages give many examples, photos and plans of how early childhood professionals have transformed their outdoor areas into magical natural playscapes, using the materials and working with people found right in your own community. Buy it at [www.earthplay.net](http://www.earthplay.net).



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

The Manitoba Child Care Association's (MCCA) 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Conference, held May 27 - 31, 2009 in Winnipeg, Manitoba gathered over a 1,000 participants from the child care sector from across Canada. Co-hosted by MCCA and the Canadian Child Care Federation the conference included a pre-conference event on sustainable child care environments: Green Goes with Everything, over 60 workshops, program tours, MCCA and CCCF annual general meetings and 250 guests at the "Celebrate" awards banquet to honour outstanding individuals working on behalf of children.

From politics to policies to practice, all the talk was on how to support child care and create healthier environments for children, staff and the planet.

The 2010 conference, to be co-hosted with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Quebec is now being planned for May 27-28 in Montreal, Quebec.



Board of Directors at AGM  
From left to right: **Linda Skinner**, Treasurer, **Janet Towers**, Secretary, **April Kalyniuk**, Chair of Member Council, **Antoinette Colasurdo**, Director, **Christine MacLeod**, Director



Chair of Member Council **April Kalyniuk**, **Pat Wege** of MCCA, and CCCF President, **Don Giesbrecht** at Awards Ceremony



CCCF President **Don Giesbrecht**



**Anne Maxwell** receiving her CCCF Recognition Award




CCCF Staff at the Gala. From left to right: **Lynda Kerr**, **Claire McLaughlin**, **Robin McMillan**, **Anne Maxwell**, **Kim Tytler** and **Valérie Bell**.



CCCF Conference Booth





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