

BC CHILD CARE PROVIDER NEWS

issue 9

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Creating Connections and a Sense of Belonging: Working With Families

UBC's Institute for Early Childhood Education and Research recently hosted *Inspired Teaching: Exploring Early Childhood Practice that Nurtures Children's Identities and Potentials*. The presenters, Margie Carter, Deb Curtis and Ann Pelo, spoke about taking our work with children and families to a deeper level.

According to Carter, Curtis and Pelo, the most important thing, when working with families, is to consciously build a positive and respectful relationship where families' interests and strengths are valued and acted on. How do we do this when we barely have a minute to spare with parents at the beginning or end of the day? Too often this is the way we view family contacts: the rushed drop-off and pick-up times when we are all in transition, parents and providers standing at the doorway hurriedly exchanging a few words.

Carter, Curtis and Pelo suggest we need to create time and space in child care programs in a new way.

In their inspirational book *Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments*, Carter and Curtis stress the importance of creating an atmosphere



for families where ownership, a sense of belonging and comfort exist. Imagine having the first space encountered in your program a welcoming area where families are encouraged to linger—a cozy couch, cushions, soft lighting,



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a plant or two. If the program is a family child care home, the transition for families may be less dramatic, especially if an area of the home can be dedicated to this. If centre-based, having both adult and child sized comfortable furniture says to adult family members, "This is a place for you, too." Other elements, such as draped fabric and natural materials, can also be incorporated throughout the halls and individual rooms to soften the space and invite both children and adults to explore. Ensure that your private meeting spaces, offices and adult washrooms aren't doing double duty as storage space for used paint cans and broken equipment.

Get to know the hopes and dreams of families in your program.

"Put something in your application form that asks about their hopes for their child as they form relationships with caregivers and teachers. During home visits, interviews, or orientation sessions, respectfully raise questions that get to the values and longings they have for their children."

(The Visionary Director: A Handbook for

Dreaming, Organizing, and Improvising in Your Center, 1998, Margie Carter and Deb Curtis) Be sensitive to any issues that families may feel uncomfortable discussing, such as economic situations and family configurations. Bulletin board displays can feature different families every month as a way to make families' values and dreams for their children visible to staff and others in concrete ways. "These strategies and your sensitivity go a long way to create an inclusive environment that

acknowledges that all families have strengths, just as all families struggle."

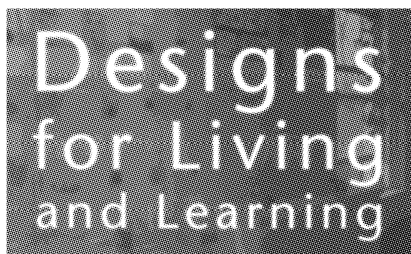
Parent involvement needs to include meaningful tasks that aren't always about cleaning, repairing or crowd control. Gather families together for events other than the regular parent meetings. In the Visionary

Director, the idea of reinventing quilting bees is promoted. "Suggest that families and staff members bring photographs, special mementos, or just their memories to create visual stories about their lives." This type of exercise is most effective when the child care providers fully participate in creating their own story, too.

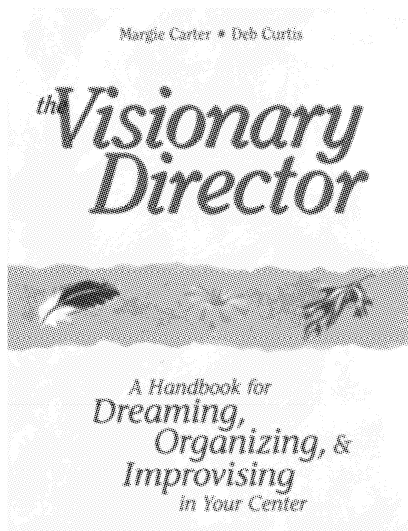
"Offer a variety of colourful background papers, magazine pictures, stickers, and old greeting cards. Get a frame shop to donate a supply of recycled mat board or foam core. Provide glue, markers, scissors and other tools for making bulletin boards or homemade books. Offer initial ideas to get people started. They could create a book or display board around family history, favourite memories, holiday celebrations, or special accomplishments."

Incorporating these creations into your curriculum and displaying them throughout your centre will encourage dialogue and sharing among children, families and child care providers.

Margie, Deb and Ann encourage all who spend their days with children and their families, no matter what the setting, to think of working with families as building a caring and learning community, where all are included and all contribute.



Transforming Early Childhood Environments



Working with Families: a Profile of Aboriginal HIPPY

Working with hard to reach families is one of the most significant challenges for early childhood service providers. Many families do not access formal child care or family drop-in programs. This article profiles a program called “HIPPY” (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters), that has developed a strategy to support parents as their preschool aged children develop kindergarten readiness skills.

Canada’s first HIPPY program was started in Vancouver in 2001 as a joint effort between Britannia Community Centre, Simon Fraser University, and the National Council of Jewish Women. It is a home-based education program that teaches parents to be their preschool children’s first teacher and gets their 3-5 year olds prepared for school.

The program focuses on intellectual stimulation, play, social engagement, building self-esteem, cultural awareness and ways to incorporate everyday activities into learning. All children receive a kit containing scissors, storybooks, crayons and plastic shapes to familiarize them with the kinds of tasks assigned in Kindergarten. Each week throughout the school year, a home helper—who speaks the family’s home language as well as English—takes a new teaching kit to each family and explains how best to get through the week’s lessons.

To access the program, families apply and are selected on the basis of need determined by income. Chosen families must make a two-year commitment to participate 30 weeks per year, concurrently with the school year. Parents spend 10 to 45 minutes every weekday helping their child with educational tasks, exercises and games. Parents also attend biweekly meetings with other parents and HIPPY staff to discuss their concerns and their progress.

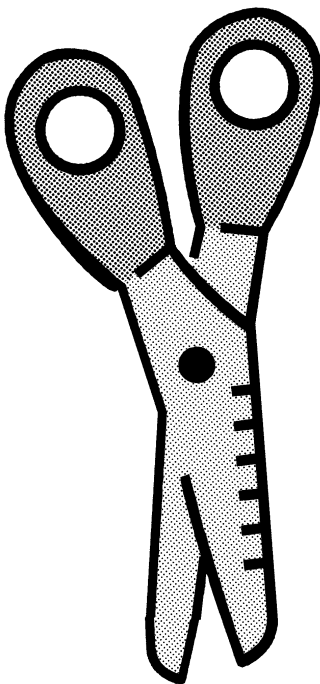
According to the 2001 Canadian Census, less than 62 per cent of Aboriginal students finish high school in BC, a statistic that led community members and educators at the Chief Dan George Centre to start Aboriginal HIPPY in 2003. The Chief Dan George Centre supports the implementation of HIPPY in Aboriginal and First Nations communities in a way that honours and respects Aboriginal cultures, languages, and unique circumstances.

“I think many of the communities that launched this first program were really feeling that their children were hitting the school system unprepared for kindergarten, and that was leading to them falling more and more behind in school”, said Tammy Harkey, the national manager for Aboriginal HIPPY. “When they hit Grade 1 they were still behind, and that gap just continues to grow. Also, there has been a lot of talk about the history of the residential school and it led parents to believe that they didn’t have the skills to teach their

children at home. I think the HIPPY program has reinforced the fact that parents have the skills to educate their children. Also, the parent/child bond is reinforced over 30 weeks each year. This attachment helps support the child’s self-confidence and further enhances the child’s growth and development.”

In 2005 Aboriginal HIPPY has grown significantly in BC. The program now operates in Musqueam, Katzie, Sechelt, Tsawwassen and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, as well as through the C’imo’ca Childcare Centre in Kitamaat, Hailika’as Heiltsuk Health Centre in Waglisla and the Vancouver Native Health Society.

For more information on the HIPPY program contact Tammy Harkey, National Program Manager, Aboriginal HIPPY-HIPPY Canada at 604-268-7966 or visit www.hippycanada.com.



Transfer of Child Care Subsidy Program

Beginning in Summer 2006, delivery of the Child Care Subsidy program will be transferred from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to the Ministry of Children and Family Development. This transfer will improve access to the program for both parents and service providers. Currently, MCFD administers the subsidy program, but does not deliver it.

Service to parents will not be affected during the phased transfer period. Both ministries will work together to ensure service quality is maintained and that both parents and service providers are well informed as the transfer progresses.

For more child care subsidy information go to www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/subsidy_promo.htm

Websites to Check Out



Harvest Resource Early Childhood Education Training and Resources, cofounded by Deb

Curtis and Margie Carter. Visit their website to see their books, videos and resources for sale. Two of their books, *Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments* and *The Visionary Director: A Handbook for Dreaming, Organizing, and Improvising in Your Center* feature in the previous article on page one. For training tips and more information about their products and services go to www.ecetrainers.com.

Resource Catalogue. Visit their website for information about membership, Best Practices Guides and Posters, Directory of FRPs in BC, the Library Resource Centre and more; www.frpofbc.ca.

BC COUNCIL *for* FAMILIES 

BC Council for Families

Offers leadership through education, training, advocacy and research for the healthy development of families. Their website has membership information and resources such as an on-line catalogue covering a wide variety of topics from building community to fathering to contemporary family trends; www.bccf.bc.ca.



B.C. Association of Family Resource Programs

BC Association of Family Resource Programs

The FRP-BC is in its 14th year of province wide networking,

consulting and advocacy, working to support community-based family resource programs in BC. FRP-BC supports its members in an effort to strengthen families and communities by fostering the healthy development of children within the context of family. Its members are community-based organizations that deliver an array of services to parents, children and caregivers across BC. They publish an annual

child care
advocacy forum

For “big picture” analysis of BC and Canadian child care trends and policies, visit the **Child Care Advocacy Forum’s** website. Here you will find literature that discusses high quality child care systems that promote healthy child development and meet diverse family needs; www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum



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