

BC Early Learning Newsletter

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Early Learning Webcasts Now Available



The Ministry of Education's Early Learning Branch kicked off 2011 by hosting two live early learning webcasts. The webcasts have now been archived and are available on the Early Learning website for viewing at:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/webcasts.htm.

The first webcast featured Dr. Stuart Shanker and Jane Bertrand who shared research and insights on self-regulation, giving particular attention to why it's so important for learning, especially in the early years. In School District No. 60 (Peace River North), over 20 teachers and community members watched the webcast together. "We all loved the session. It was very useful and timely" said a district staff member. "We really appreciated the thought provoking ideas and discussions it has brought among us."

The second webcast featured Susan Fraser, who shared her expertise on the Reggio Emilia experience of project-based learning. Sue provided many examples of preschool and primary children's projects. In School District No. 59 (Peace River South), 12 educators braved -30°C weather to watch the webcast together. "These presentations have been the best organized, most powerful webinars I have ever been involved in! We all felt it was very worthwhile to attend. I'm surprised at the number of principals, teachers, and support staff from older grades that are interested in these sessions. The topics seem to be universal and compelling to all grades" said the district early learning contact.

Both webcasts focused on the importance of rich, play-based learning environments, respectful relationships between educators and children, and holding a positive image of the learner as a competent, capable learner with personal learning needs. Self-regulation and project-based learning are key considerations for 21st century learning.

These webcasts are available online at: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/webcasts.htm

StrongStart BC Expands to 326 Programs in 2011/12



StrongStart BC will expand to 326 programs in 2011/12, a significant growth from the 12 pilot programs which began in 2006. This most recent expansion signals both a strong commitment for the program and the intent to offer the programs in more communities across the province. The intent for this expansion was to reach rural communities with no early learning programs, vulnerable neighbourhoods and under-served communities.

New StrongStart BC programs for 2011/12:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| SD #23 Central Okanagan | Peachland Elementary |
| SD #36 Surrey | Senator Reid Elementary and James Ardiel Elementary |
| SD #39 Vancouver | Lord Strathcona Elementary |
| SD #46 Sunshine Coast | Outreach Program |
| SD #52 Prince Rupert | Lax Kxeen Elementary |
| SD #71 Comox Valley | Outreach Program |
| SD #73 Kamloops-Thompson | A E Perry Elementary |
| SD #83 North Okanagan-Shuswap | Outreach Program |
| SD #92 Nisga'a | Outreach Program |

Full Day Kindergarten Exemplar Videos for Purchase

Districts are enjoying and using the *Full Day Kindergarten Exemplar Video Series*, which is available on the Ministry's website at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/fdk/exemplar_videos.htm. Complimentary copies of the DVD were sent to each district in March 2011. Additional copies of the DVD are available from Crown Publications. The cost is \$11.95 ea + shipping. Ordering information is available at: www.crownpub.bc.ca/pubdetail.aspx?nato=7610003453. The viewing guide is available for download on the FDK Exemplar Video series website at: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/fdk/pdfs/exemplar_video_guide.pdf.



Celebrating Two Years of Professional Development across the Province

A partnership between 2010 LegaciesNow and the Ministry of Education provided a series of professional development experiences for StrongStart BC facilitators between October 2009 and February 2011. On February 4th, 2011 SD #36 Surrey hosted 311 participants from 58 districts to celebrate the final 2010 LegaciesNow StrongStart BC Professional Development session.

The professional development series focused on engaging families and building an early learning professional community. Themes within the professional development series included:

- Expanding facilitator knowledge
- Networking with colleagues and community
- Extending practical strategies and skills
- Reflecting on and learning from practice



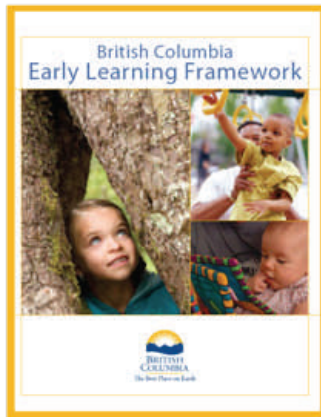
Participants identified how the professional development series brought them closer together as a professional community. The training gave them tools and strategies to provide high quality programs to families and meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences for young children. The sessions helped them make valuable connections to community and provincial organizations, and improved their ability to respond to the diverse needs of the families.

Many groups identified the importance of including principals in the training sessions—“If the school district is supportive and the school principal is supportive, then StrongStart BC facilitators and centres feel they are valued and that the work they do is important” said a district early learning contact.

Thank you to the Early Learning and Family Literacy team at 2010LegaciesNow, led by Fiona Morrison, who planned and presented these sessions, and travelled across the Province, bringing StrongStart BC professional development opportunities to districts.

These sessions were captured on video, and are now available to watch on the LearnNowBC website at: www.learnnowbc.ca/educators/EarlyLearningCentre/StrongStart/default.aspx . The series, entitled *Connecting with Families*, includes four self-directed modules and supports StrongStart BC facilitators to create vibrant, rich, and engaging programs.

BC Early Learning Framework Training Available Online



In 2009, the Ministry of Education partnered with three British Columbia post-secondary institutions to provide professional development opportunities on the BC Early Learning Framework.

This training was provided to various early years audiences, including early childhood educators (ECEs), faculty and staff in ECE training institutions and other service providers. The success of these sessions was evident from the overwhelming interest in the training and the attendance at these sessions. However, in spite of the numerous sessions delivered around the province, there was still a significant demand for the training in many communities.

In response to this, the Ministry partnered with the University of Victoria and LearnNowBC in 2010 to make the training available online. Self-directed training modules are now available for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). The training is divided into six modules, which each take about 45-60 minutes to complete, and will provide Licensed ECEs who complete all modules with hours towards their professional development certification requirement. An online discussion forum is available to network with other ECE's to discuss how the framework can be implemented into their practice.

This new online format will ensure that the training is accessible around the province. To access the online framework modules, please visit the LearnNowBC website at: www.learnnowbc.ca/educators/EarlyLearningCentre/EarlyLearningFramework/default.aspx.



The **French** versions of *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* and the *Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide* are now available. These resources can be downloaded from the Ministry website at: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/understanding_elf.htm and www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/fdk/.



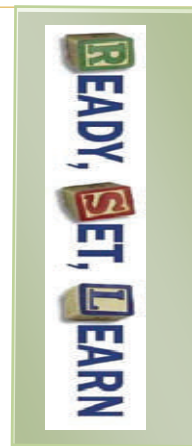
Ready, Set, Learn Evaluation Form

A friendly reminder that the Ready, Set, Learn Principal's Evaluation Form is due no later than **May 29, 2011**. Public schools participating in Ready, Set, Learn must submit the evaluation form at: www.bcedextranet.gov.bc.ca/rsl/form.htm.

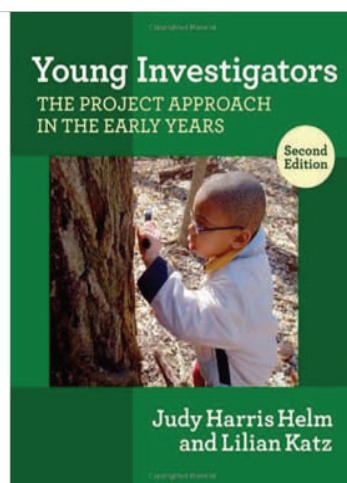
The username and password is provided in each school district's 2010/11 Early Learning Transfer Under Agreement.

Registration for Ready, Set, Learn 2011/12 will open in May 2011.

If you have any questions, please contact Melanie Bradford at: Melanie.Bradford@gov.bc.ca or call 250-356-6716.



Book Review: *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years* by *Judy Harris Helm and Lilian Katz*



Research continues to show that children's brain development is enriched by active, engaged learning experiences. The authors of *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years* have illustrated how child-initiated projects effectively engage young children.

Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years introduces project based learning as a teaching and learning tool and provides relevant advice for implementing projects in an early learning setting. The book offers many practical ideas on how to plan, develop, implement, and reflect on long term projects that engage early learners. The examples demonstrate how the projects support and incorporate curriculum goals and use documentation to make children's learning visible. The authors also include some insight and techniques for using project based learning with toddlers.

Blog On!

Blogging is a great way to keep families connected to their local StrongStart BC program. Maureen Wagner, StrongStart BC facilitator at Brooklyn Elementary in Comox, has created a blog for her StrongStart BC program to communicate about the centre. For educators, blogging provides a way to provide information about the Strong Start BC program, reflect on children's learning and communicate with families. It also boosts digital literacy. Maureen says, "More of my families are regularly reading the blog and finding ideas to do at home. I find it very worthwhile to look back on the day and to reflect on the program. There's quite a community online and it's been fun getting involved." One of Maureen's recent blogs reflected on a new learning centre in the program to explore fairies. Maureen wanted to provoke children's curiosity about fairies so she included delicate ceramic flower fairies, wooden mushrooms and shiny found objects to the learning centre. Multiple textures were added to create a visual and sensory experience for children. She posted pictures of the children exploring in the centres and included reflections of the centre on the blog.

To learn more about setting up at blog for your StrongStart BC program, visit www.blogspot.com

Maureen's blog can be viewed at: <http://strongstart.blogspot.com/>

Fairy World

This week I set up an "invite to play" with fairies.



Garden fairies.

I found little ceramic flower fairies with dangly legs.



The dangly legs were fun as the children stood them up and wiggled them back and forth. Although they were a bit tricky to sit down again.



The fairy experience pictured above is a great example of supporting children towards the BC Early Learning Framework learning goal "to explore the world using their bodies and all their senses". The BC Early Learning Framework can be found on the Ministry's website at: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/pdfs/early_learning_framework.pdf

Early Explorers



Captain Cook, Marie Currie and Bill Gates were all explorers in their fields. They spent much of their adult lives asking questions and seeking answers to areas that interested and intrigued them. Young children are often described as natural explorers because they innately exhibit many of the same behaviours of these famous explorers.

For young children, the world around them is new and exciting. By exploring the world around them, asking questions, and making observations, children construct their knowledge of their world and the natural environment.

The capacity to explore and create is vital to nurturing the zest for life that is the basis for all learning.... Supporting children's explorative play is perhaps the most important – and the most natural and accessible – means to promote meaningful learning in the early years.

(British Columbia Early Learning Framework, 2008, p. 23)

Adults play a key role in encouraging and provoking children's exploration by asking questions to extend and deepen their learning. As partners in children's learning, adults can encourage the exploratory nature of children by encouraging them to make predictions, and ask questions, and by probing their ideas, which may lead to new questions. Providing authentic materials (both natural and found), engaging in group conversations and shared reading, and documenting learning (e.g. photographs) all support exploration and inquiry.

A thoughtfully prepared environment can provide many opportunities for children to explore, problem solve, and investigate. Many early learning programs provide a science/nature centre or discovery centre where adults and children can explore together. This learning centre is quite often equipped with materials such as prisms, plants, and magnifying glasses that introduce children to the wonders of the natural world. By changing the materials to reflect the interests of the children, as well as what is going on in the world around them (e.g. changing seasons) will help to maintain their interest. Long term projects will let children delve deeper into topics that are of particular interest to them.

Because projects are open-ended, children are more engaged and levels of difficulty can be adjusted, allowing for inclusion of children with special needs or use in combined grade classrooms. Projects provide numerous opportunities for children to practise observing, estimating, identifying, labelling, categorizing, classifying, and reflecting on new discoveries in order to make sense of the world. (Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide, 2010, p. 20)

Families can be encouraged to get involved with their children's exploration by simply recording and responding to the questions they ask. Adults don't have to have all the answers. Parents also can explore, learn and share ideas with their children. Reading books, asking other people their opinions and conducting experiments are all great ways to promote exploration.

What Adults Can Do to Support Exploration in Young Children

Science World created Big Science for Little Hands @Home activities to assist families, caregivers and preschool-age children to explore science together. The resources are free and require few, easy-to-find materials. The @Home resources are available in 8 languages and can be found on Science World's website at: www.scienceworld.ca/preschool.

Adults can also support children's exploration by:

- Providing rich, multi-sensory materials such as mirrors, plants, scales, magnets
- Using open-ended questions
- Discussing a child's observations "I see the plant has a new leaf. I wonder how that happened?"
- Providing old small appliances or broken toys for children to take apart
- Providing opportunities to explore in multiple environments, both inside and outdoors

The Ministry of Education hosts a [website](#) that contains current information on all its Early Learning Initiatives: [Full Day Kindergarten](#), [StrongStart BC](#), [Ready, Set, Learn](#) [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#) [Early Learning Research and Publications](#)

We would appreciate your feedback and new articles for the BC Early Learning Newsletter. Please send your comments and ideas for future issues to Janet Powell via email at: Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca.