

Fall 2008

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BC Early Learning Newsletter

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Reflections on “Reflecting on Quality” StrongStart BC Facilitators’ Meeting October 24, 2008

The Ministry of Education hosted a professional development day for StrongStart BC facilitators on October 24, 2008 in Vancouver.

The meeting focused on the StrongStart BC pilot evaluation and the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*.

Over 180 facilitators attended this meeting.

Here is a sample of the meeting evaluation feedback:

- 93% felt they had developed a better understanding of the

British Columbia Early Learning Framework’s image of the child.

- 95% felt they had developed a better understanding of the British Columbia Early Learning Framework’s image of the family.
- 86% felt they had developed a better understanding of how they could use pedagogical narrations in a StrongStart setting.
- 94% responded positively when asked if the vendor area was beneficial.

Several respondents suggested topics for future sessions, including sharing of effective practices among centres. We are looking at a variety of ways to facilitate sharing of ideas and information to StrongStart facilitators, early learning contacts, and school districts. We will be using newsletters, the Ministry’s website, Elluminate! sessions, and other ways. Stay tuned!

Thanks to participants for taking the time to provide your feedback on the meeting.



Ministry of Education Early Learning Staff,
Janet Powell, Melanie Gordon, and Di Byrne

Comments from StrongStart BC Facilitators:

“This day was so original. Thank you so much”

“These great stories (Pedagogical Narrations) were fun. Accolades to those who created the examples”

“The StrongStart Evaluation is an awesome resource to use in a multitude of ways”

StrongStart BC Evaluation



“The StrongStart Evaluation is an awesome resource to use in a multitude of ways”

The purpose of the StrongStart BC pilot evaluation research study was to document the StrongStart BC program and report on its operation and effectiveness so that government, communities and school could guide the development of StrongStart BC programs. The evaluation teams comprised two ECE and school professionals who visited the sites twice over the course of the two years, guided by Dr. Clyde Hertzman, director of HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership).

The two year study employed case-study methodology – focus groups, interview, data

collection and analysis, observations and surveys – to explore 12 diverse pilot sites located in urban and rural settings. Findings were based on (a) data provided by parents, staff and involved community members in over 300 key informant interviews, and (b) three surveys that canvassed the views of over 600 parents.

The key finding of the evaluation was that government should expand the program, in collaboration with local community leadership.

Some of the questions explored in the evaluation included:

- What did the

StrongStart BC program offer families?

- How frequently did parents attend the program?
- Why did parents attend the program?
- Why did parents stop attending StrongStart BC
- What did parents like about the program?
- Were the 12 StrongStart BC pilots a success?

The full evaluation report can be accessed at the UBC-Help website at: http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/documents/2008/StrongStartBC_Evaluation_Report.pdf

Coming Soon! *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice*



Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice will be a companion to the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*. It will guide the reader to reflect on the vision, principles and learning goals set out in the Framework. It also offers specific tools for incorporating the latest research in innovative practice approaches.

Early childhood educators are more than teachers. Along with children and their families, they are part of a community of

learners. The companion guidebook is intended to stimulate ECEs as learners to wonder about the children they serve, examine their programs, and assess their own work with families and children. Assessing their work and themselves is part of learning and growing as individuals and as a profession. It is in this spirit that the Province of British Columbia developed its unique *Early Learning Framework*.

This guide will be used as a learning resource in the professional development

being offered across the province, led by the University of Victoria, Selkirk College, and Northern Lights College.

Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice will be distributed to all StrongStart BC facilitators once it is published, and additional copies will be available for purchase through the Queen’s Printer. Please watch the Early Learning [website](#) for more details, when available.

Reminder:

The British Columbia Early Learning Framework can be accessed for free from the Ministry of Education’s website at: http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/strongstart_bc/resources_links.htm

Brain Development and Storytelling

For young children, storytelling is a unique way of learning and supporting emergent literacy and oral language development. Storytelling refers to the oral re-telling of a narrative through the spoken word with no tangible scripts, not reading texts aloud, or reciting memorized texts. Storytelling is the principal form of expressing and channelling knowledge and wisdom in Aboriginal communities and other cultures. Research indicates that it promote social values; empathy and respect.¹ Storytelling is valuable for three reasons. First, narratives are a useful tool for the development of oral language. Second, narratives support literacy and predict academic success. Third, there is evidence that narratives are related to conceptual development.¹

Storytelling has also been linked to the development of **executive function skills**. Executive function skills include resisting distraction, giving a more

considered response instead of a first impulse, working with information that is held in the mind, and the mental flexibility to think “outside the box”.

Why is executive functioning important? The ability to regulate social, emotional, and cognitive behaviours has been shown to be an indicator of success in school. Executive functioning equals self regulation. Executive functioning has a stronger association with academic achievement than IQ or entry-level reading or math skills. Two components of self regulation, working memory and inhibitory control, each independently predict arithmetic competence in preschool children and are important for reading acquisition. Social-emotional self-regulation seems to be related to the ability to regulate learning-related social behaviours, such as listening to and following directions, staying on task. We use these skills every day when we think about what

we have to do, organize our thoughts, control impulses, come up with ideas, solve problems and integrate feedback from our environment.

Math and storytelling may seem like very different abilities, but a study at the University of Waterloo suggests that preschool children’s early storytelling abilities are predictive of their mathematical ability two years later.

The University of Waterloo [study](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2004-07/nsae-url072904.php) suggests that building strong storytelling skills early in the preschool years may be helpful in preparing children for learning mathematics when they enter school. It can be accessed at: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2004-07/nsae-url072904.php

Stay tuned for an exciting initiative involving storytelling and StrongStart BC!



Circle time is a great opportunity for storytelling

“The ability to regulate social, emotional, and cognitive behaviours has been shown to be an indicator of success in school.”

¹ Rebecca Isbell, Joseph Sobol, Liane Lindauer, and April Lowrance, “The Effects of Storytelling and Story Reading on the Oral Language Complexity and Story Comprehension of Young Children,” *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3, December 2004; Beth Casey, Sumru Erkut, Ineke Ceder and Jessica Mercer Young, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Volume 29, Issue 1, January-February 2008, Pages 29-48

¹ Marie A. Stadler and Gay Cuming Ward, “Supporting the Narrative Development of Young Children,” *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2, October 2005.
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/3e/08.pdf

Registering Children at StrongStart BC Programs

"The secret is that Betty builds the relationship first, and makes sure this program is something they might be interested in."

Roots of Empathy: Looking for Instructors

Training will be held in Vancouver and 100 Mile House. Those trained will be begin implementing Roots of Empathy for this school year, 2008/09

For more information or an application form, please contact:

Mari Corlett
Phone: 604 713-5175
Email:
mcorlett@rootsofempathy.org

Several StrongStart BC centres have offered some helpful ideas to address the challenges you may be having with registering children.

Anne Cooper, Superintendent and district early learning contact for SD 19 (Revelstoke) tells us:

"Betty Switzer, our StrongStart Facilitator does the initial contact with parents, providing them a letter that sets the tone. Children are registered after Betty has seen the family. The secret is that Betty builds the relationship first, and makes sure this program is something they might be interested in. We then give them the registration to take home and bring it back with their birth certificate. (Please see page 6 for a parent letter that is provided with the registration form.) Patience and reminders are also required! Betty then provides the registration forms to our district office receptionist who is providing the data entry support (as opposed to the school secretary, as we wanted to separate

that out as it is such a busy time of year at the school)."

MaryAnn McCrea, Director of Instruction from School District 71 (Comox Valley) shares the following idea:

"We have the parent/guardian/caregiver fill out a registration form when they arrive at one of our StrongStart BC locations. We manually keep track of attendance. Then once a month we have one of our admin assistants enter the data into BCeSIS. We find this is the only way we can do it - as there is no mass registration (like there is for Kindergarten - people will come and register throughout the school year) and to further complicate things we have parents who attend at multiple sites - they may go to one school on Monday and Tuesday and a different school on Friday - because they like variety, they like the different facilitators, they go with their friends. So having the registration and attendance tracking done centrally was our only solution.

As the year goes on we may have our facilitators do the attendance at their centre on a weekly basis - but as we are just in the midst of a full change over to BCeSIS this is not going to happen until after the New Year at the earliest."

Some districts have contracted with an on-call secretary to enter the attendance information and request PENs. Later in the year, the regular secretary will take over. At other centres, the StrongStart facilitator checks the valid ID at the centre and ensures the registration form is complete, and then forwards that information to the secretary on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to request PENs and update attendance.

If you have some hints for what works in your centre, sent them to us so we can share them with your colleagues. Please send to Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca

Example Letter from Little Mountain Elementary StrongStart

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

Welcome to Revelstoke's StrongStart Early Learning Centre

StrongStart BC is a provincial program that is fully funded by The Ministry of Education. We are happy to report that Revelstoke was the first new centre to open in the province, and we are now entering our third year!

*The Ministry recognizes that children are born with the innate desire to learn. From birth, children are naturally curious and motivated to make sense of the world around them. Children's relationships, experiences, and environments during the early years greatly influence whether, and in which ways, they realize their full potential to learn. It is recognized that children learn through **play**... "Play is vital to children's healthy development and learning".*

BC's Early Learning Framework

Although this program is a free drop-in program, the Ministry does require that each child is registered, and parents sign their child in each time they attend. **Please take the time to fill in the registration form, and bring it back to the centre the next time you attend, with your child's birth certificate.** It is important that we provide this information to show that we support this initiative that invests in the young children and families in Revelstoke and throughout the province.

Thanks for playing,
Betty Switzer, ECE
StrongStart Facilitator

Importance of BCeSIS Data:

Valuable Information to Maintain StrongStart BC as a Priority

With the assistance of school and district staff, StrongStart BC centres collected a lot of valuable and informative data last school year. Although the data collected last year is incomplete, we still learned a lot about participation rates and attendance across the province:

- In the 2007/08 school year, there were over 91,000 visits to StrongStart BC early learning centres, and

approximately 6,000 children attended a StrongStart BC early learning centre during the school year.

- From the available data, April 2008 was the month with the highest participation rate last year. This may be due in part to some centres just getting started later in the year.
- One surprising finding was that many children attended

more than one StrongStart BC centre.



READY, SET, LEARN

Evaluation Results 2007/08

Ready, Set, Learn (RSL) is a school readiness initiative that provides an opportunity for all school districts and their elementary schools offering kindergarten to influence school readiness of three-year-olds, in partnership with participating community-based early childhood service providers and other community agencies.

In 2007/08 1,103 public schools participated in RSL. Over 22,500 preschoolers and approximately 23,500 parents attended RSL events at public schools.

This represents an increase of over 2,000 children attending RSL events compared to 2006/07. Schools reported that the response to RSL from parents and preschooler was encouraging with close to 100% of attendees rating the events as positive.

Feedback from the public schools on RSL 2007/08 was very positive with 95% of schools rating RSL events as “good” or higher. The majority of public schools report that RSL event(s) were facilitated in cooperation with community organizations and

partners in addition to the school and district personnel. They report many beneficial relationships and early connections were established with and among families and community partners.

In 2007/08, 86 independent schools participated. Of the independent schools that registered for *Ready Set Learn*, 99% rated the event as “good” or higher. School districts and independent schools support the concept of *Ready, Set, Learn* and would like it to continue.

The Importance of Principals

George Jay Elementary StrongStart opened in September 2007. With this being our second year running, I wouldn't be able to tell you where we would be right now if it were not for the tremendous support of the staff, primarily that of the principal in this school. George Jay, in my opinion, is a school like no other; there are countless resources within the school for children and their families and for that reason this was the perfect spot for a StrongStart program.

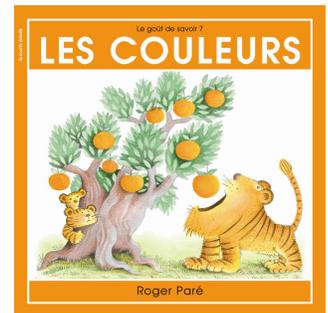
Kathy Upton was a brand new principal in our district and was set to open up the doors to a hoard of new students, brand new staff and a StrongStart Centre. To me this sounded more like the

impossible, but Kathy was up for the job. With all that was going on in her days as a new principal she made sure that I, as a new staff member and also as the facilitator of the new StrongStart program, was comfortable. She would make daily appearances and mingle amongst our families; she would lend her support when necessary to me in any way she could think of. Some days it was reading a story to my group (just for the fun of it), other days it was lending emotional support to the families and some days it was just peeking in the door to say “Hi”. Kathy would not only lend her support during program hours but would also extend herself to me outside of that time, including me in staff professional development and making

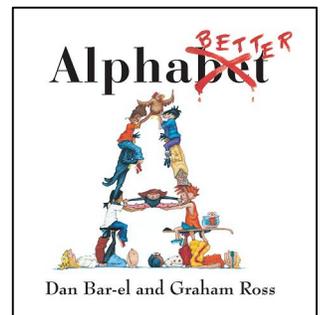
sure I knew about the many social activities that go on in the school throughout the year.

To truly have a successful program, I feel you need support from not only your district but your principal must give their full support to the program as well, and as I can respect that this is a very difficult task in the beginning it makes for a lot smoother ride in the long run.

There are three very simple things Kathy has done for me to help make StrongStart a successful environment: she encourages, becomes involved, and respects. I am one of the many school district employees that fill this school and make it the best it can be and she makes sure



RSL French Book for 07/08



RSL English Book for 07/08

that I not only believe it but that the others believe it as well.

I would encourage all principals to help your early childhood educators share their knowledge and talent with the rest of your staff, talk about the importance of gym time and library time and believe that this program will have countless positive effects on your school.

Kathy has done all this for me and I would really like to thank her for being so supportive. I would also like to credit George Jay StrongStart's success to the hard work put in by our amazing administration staff led by Kathy Upton.

- By Wendy Legge, ECE, StrongStart BC Facilitator

School District 43 (Coquitlam): StrongStart BC Website and Posters



School District 43 (Coquitlam) has developed a website for their districts' StrongStart BC programs. This website describes what StrongStart BC is, the various schools where it is located, the hours of operation, and important events. Take a look at this innovative [website](http://public.sd43.bc.ca/district/strongstart/default.aspx).
<http://public.sd43.bc.ca/district/strongstart/default.aspx>

School District 43 has also printed up a set of posters describing

various Early Learning Activities, and what children are learning at these areas. StrongStart BC facilitators who attended the StrongStart BC facilitators meeting in October received a

complementary set of posters. There are 8 laminated posters in a set, and each poster is 11.5 " x 17". A set of 8 posters cost \$20. Posters can be ordered by contacting Nancy Carl at: ncarl@sd43.bc.ca.

"Play Dough. When I use play dough, I am learning to ...

- Experiment
- Share
- Handle different textures and tools
- Build strength in my hand muscles
- Create different sizes and shapes
- Develop hand-eye coordination

Boost BC Program: Laws that Save Lives



Boost BC program
 Boost BC is a home and school program that supports BC's new laws requiring the use of booster seats by children under nine. It is designed to: increase booster seat use in BC, make children more accepting of booster seats, and educate parents about the laws and the needs and benefits of booster seats

**New laws in effect
 July 1, 2008**

All children must use booster seats until their 9th birthday unless they have reached the height of 145 cm (4'9") tall.

Booster seats save lives

Most children under the age of 9 are too small for adult seat belts to be beneficial in a motor vehicle collision. A booster seat properly positions a child in a vehicle's seat belt, reducing the risk of serious injury and

death. But while studies show booster seats reduce the risk of injury and death by up to 60% over vehicle seat belts alone, less than 50% of BC children who should use a booster seat actually do.

Boost BC resources for families

Many helpful resources can be accessed for free at http://www.tsfbcaa.com/under_nine_years for use with families in your StrongStart BC program:

Collaborating with Child Care Resource and Referral

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) programs in your communities welcome connection and collaboration with StrongStart BC. CCRR programs can provide support through information, outreach, resource library, networking and learning opportunities.

CCRR programs also support families through parenting information, workshops, resource lending libraries and community referrals regarding children and families.

To find out more, contact your **regional CCRR Coordinator:**

Sue Irwin

Vancouver Coastal Regional Coordinator
Sue.irwin@nscr.bc.ca
(604) 985-7138 (local 108)

Barb Presseau

Fraser Regional Coordinator
presseau@comserv.bc.ca
(604) 847-2239

Mary Walters

Interior Regional Coordinator
maryw@kootenaykids.ca

Judy Newell

North Regional Coordinator
nccc.regional@xplornet.com
(250) 845-3624

Delta McDonell

Vancouver Island Regional Coordinator
dmcdonell@cvacl.org
(250) 746-4135 (local 234)



Big Science for Little Hands

Science World is introducing *Big Science for Little Hands*, science resources designed specifically for teachers and caregivers of 3-5 year-old children. These resources complement what early childhood educators are already doing and offer ideas to inspire further exploration. **Round the Circle** and **Wet and Dry** are the first two activity sheets available. The intent of this program is for children to experience each concept rather than simply talking about it. Each activity can serve as a starting point for further

exploration. The Ministry of Education is providing funding for Science World to develop 8 more activity resources over the next two years, which will be posted online when available.

Round the Circle

Activities to explore round things, things that roll, and things that spin. Circles and wheels, rolling and spinning.
http://www.scienceworld.ca/pdf/Activities/BSLH-Circle_web.pdf

Wet & Dry

Activities to explore being wet and dry. Wet

and dry bags, sponges and sand castles.
http://www.scienceworld.ca/pdf/Activities/BSLH-WetDry_web.pdf

As Science World continues to develop programming for young children, they are interested in feedback from StrongStart BC facilitators. Please complete their online survey at <http://survey.scienceworld.ca/survey.aspx?surveyid=71> after you have had an opportunity to review the resources. Science World values your feedback.



StrongStartBC

Quick Quotes

A Grandmother from Maple Ridge shared her pleasure at attending StrongStart with the Ministry of Education. "I just wanted to tell you that I am a grandparent taking care of my 19-month old grand daughter, and I visited StrongStart for the first time today. We both really enjoyed the program and will be coming back. I think the money from the province is well spent on StrongStart."

Our Seed Experiment Photos



A Creative StrongStart BC Event

All StrongStart BC centres hold official openings where dignitaries make speeches, the press is invited, and the centre is welcomed into the school. The official opening at School District 34's Máméle'awt Aboriginal Education Centre in Abbotsford provided it's own unique twist to the event. The Abbotsford Aboriginal

StrongStart BC Centre was opened via a traditional Sto:lo honouring ceremony, where centre staff honoured a family that has attended the program since its first day of operation. In traditional Sto:lo protocol, witnesses were called to observe the blanketing and honouring of the father, mother, and child that made up the

honoured family. Upon having recognized the family, witnesses were asked to come forward and offer words of encouragement to the program and to the family. Children attending the StrongStart BC program prior to the official opening, spent time making gifts for the ceremony.

Early Learning Activity: Our Seed Experiment

Beth Currie, facilitator at Ucluelet Elementary StrongStart, sent in this early learning activity, called "Our Seed Experiment."

We used a package of Lima beans from the grocery store and we read a book call *All About Seeds* by Melvin Berger.

We placed some beans in plastic bags with a napkin, water and our names and then placed them in the window (a light, warm place).

We placed some beans in a plastic bag with a napkin and water and then put it in the refrigerator (a dark, cold place).

We placed some beans in a plastic bag with a

napkin and no water and then put it in a drawer that was not hot or cold and had no sunshine.

What we saw:

In the bags with our names on it, the seeds got bigger and their white coats broke. They started to have little bumps come out of the seeds.

The bag in the refrigerator, the beans got bigger and their white coats broke. They didn't have little bumps come out of the seeds. After two weeks in the refrigerator they got mushy and yucky looking.

The beans in the bag with no water or light did

nothing, they stayed the same.

Our Final Experiment:

We put soil in the sensory table and played with it, driving our trucks through it and shoveling it into buckets and small containers. After a few days the bumps coming out of our seeds were getting bigger so Olivia, Owen, Kaida and Beth planted the seeds in big plastic glasses that we could see into.

If you have a great early learning activity to share, please send it along to:

Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca

Don't Forget....

The Ministry of Education hosts a website that contains current information on all its Early Learning Initiatives. Please visit the website for information on:

- [StrongStart BC](#)
- [Ready, Set, Learn](#)
- [Early Learning Framework](#)
- [Research and Publications](#)

We would appreciate you feedback on the Early Learning Newsletter. Please send you comments and ideas for future issues to Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca