

# *BC Early Learning Network Newsletter*

**Spring 2008**

**Volume 1, Issue 2**

## **What an Exciting Time for Early Learning in British Columbia!**

On February 12, 2008, Lieutenant Governor Steven Pointe presented the annual Speech from the Throne. In this speech, there were 2 key announcements concerning the area of early learning:

1. Another 316 Strong Start BC centres will be added in the next two years, for a total of 400 in BC by 2010.
2. A new Early Childhood Learning Agency has been established. It is assessing the feasibility and costs of full school day kindergarten for five-year olds. It is also undertaking a feasibility study of providing parents with the choice of day-long kindergarten for four-year-olds by 2010, and for three-year-olds by 2012. That report will be completed and released within the year.

**StrongStart BC Outreach Program:** Five school districts will be piloting a StrongStart BC outreach program. These programs will fill a need in those rural and remote communities with too few children to warrant operating a StrongStart BC early learning centre. The StrongStart BC outreach program will operate in communities with no or few other community based early learning programs. The evaluation of these outreach pilots will support future opportunities for districts.



### **The BC Early Learning Framework**

The BC Early Learning Framework is now available and being distributed to early childhood professionals and early learning stakeholders across the province. The framework was developed in partnership with the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education, and Health. The purpose of the framework is to articulate a common vision for children, families and communities with respect to early learning. The framework sets out holistic and pedagogically sound approaches to early learning and development, which includes four areas of early learning: Well Being and Belonging, Exploration and Creativity, Languages and Literacies, and Social Responsibility and Diversity.

The Early Learning Framework has been sent to StrongStart BC facilitators, Early Childhood professionals, and other early learning stakeholders. The framework can also be downloaded electronically at: [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/early\\_learning/early\\_learning\\_framework.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/early_learning/early_learning_framework.htm) or additional hard copies may be purchased from Queen's Printer at a cost of \$2.45 + GST.

Three post-secondary institutions (the University of Victoria, Selkirk College, and Northern Lights College) have partnered with government to create and deliver professional development to implement the framework. This training will be provided to various early years' audiences, including StrongStart BC facilitators, ECEs, staff in ECE training institutions, and other service providers beginning in the fall 2008. Information about training sessions will be posted shortly on the Ministry of Education's early learning website.

StrongStart BC facilitators should use the framework immediately to guide their program and practices. The framework can be used as a tool to reflect on the early learning experiences that are created with and for children, to guide the program of activities, and to support dialogue with and between families about their children's early learning.

## PEN Assignment and Collecting Attendance

Districts are required to ensure each child attending a StrongStart BC program is assigned a Personal Education Number (PEN).

In order to collect enrolment and attendance information about the children attending the program, districts will need to first request PENs from the Ministry. Please ensure that the information on the registration form is verified with valid identification. Inaccurate information may result in the attendance of children not being reported. Remember: a child's PEN will follow them from StrongStart BC through to grade 12, therefore, please ensure the information entered is accurate.

Daily attendance must be taken and reported to the Ministry in the approved format. The first reporting deadline for attendance was April 10, 2008. **Please note, the next reporting deadline is July 10, 2008.** StrongStart BC programs on BCeSIS will submit their information using this format. For non-BCeSIS programs, a template was given to submit the attendance data.

Effective September 1, 2008, the Ministry will accept Early Learning data files via BCeSIS only. Processes have been set up for this information to be transferred to the Ministry via a secure data exchange method. Funding for StrongStart BC programs is contingent on BCeSIS reporting.

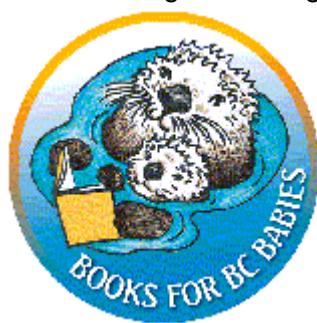
For more information about **PEN Assignment and collecting attendance** visit:  
[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/early\\_learning/pen.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/early_learning/pen.htm).

## Need Birth Certificate Information?

All children who attend StrongStart BC programs must be assigned a PEN. Personal information about a child (name, date of birth) must be verified with valid identification. The most common piece of identification is the BC birth certificate, but many children do not have this document. Please advise parents that they can apply for their child's birth certificate at any time, not just in the months immediately after birth. More information on how to apply for a birth certificate can be found at: <http://www.vs.gov.bc.ca/>. There is now an online application service for ordering birth certificates. The cost of a birth certificate is \$27.

## Books for BC Babies

Books for BC Babies is a community-based literacy program focusing on the importance of reading to newborns. Through the program, every baby born in British Columbia will receive a book bag containing a board book, a CD and information about libraries and other services in their community. The program is one of several initiatives aimed at making British Columbia the most literate jurisdiction in North America by 2010. **Books for BC Babies** seeks to improve community literacy levels using a partnership model. The program recognizes the role that public libraries play in BC communities, providing resources and programming to support infant and children's growth and development. Library staff are rooted in their communities and are able to connect parents with local services and resource people. Contact [your local public library](#) to enquire about the program in your community.



**Early Learning Activity: What's Inside the Coconut? By Carol Lundrigan  
Westview Elementary StrongStart (SD 44, North Vancouver)**

At circle time, there was a discussion about the coconut. The children examined the coconut by shaking, knocking, rolling, pulling the husk, and feeling the outside texture. They were curious about the inside of the coconut. "There is milk inside." "There is water inside." You can drink the milk." "It's white inside because of the milk."

The children shared their theories about how to open the coconut:



"We can use a straw." "We can use a knife." "We can use scissors."

When none of these ideas worked, they decided to try and bang it open. It still wouldn't open up.

The parents were eager to give them the answer on how to open the coconut; however, I encouraged the parents to let the children continue with their thinking process. After more discussion, one of the children suggested a hammer. "The hammer is hard and the coconut is hard." It was the hammer that finally opened up the coconut. The children had found a solution. By valuing the children's thinking process, the experience was meaningful for the children, the parents, and the facilitator. Giving the children time to think, and explore various strategies for opening the coconut, showed how competent and knowledgeable the children are.



**Links to the BC Early Learning Framework:**

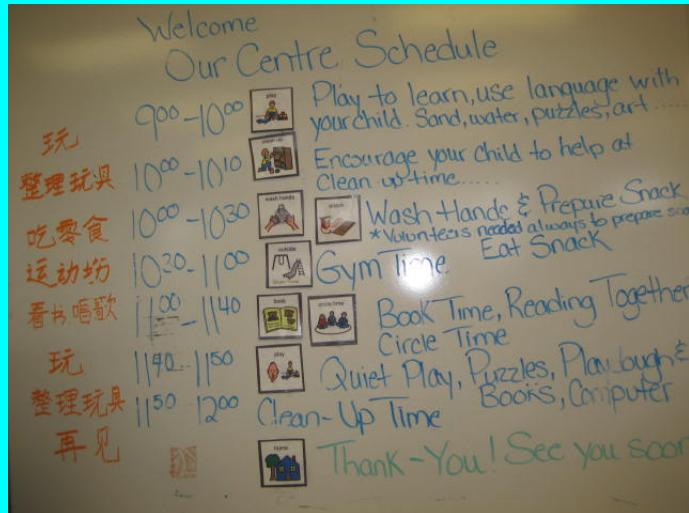
- Exploration and Creativity- actively exploring, thinking, and reasoning; identifying and trying possible solutions; developing a sense of wonder
- Languages and Literacies- communicate thoughts and experiences; communicate with others
- Well-being and Belonging – express and accept a wide range of views and thoughts, feel valued
- Social responsibility and diversity – express a positive regard for others

## Example of a StrongStart BC Centre Daily Schedule

### Forest Grove StrongStart BC Centre SD 41, Burnaby

\*Chinese characters have been used in front of each time period, to give the instructions in a second language. Pictographs have also been used for adults and children who have challenges reading and understanding English.

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 9:00 – 10:00:  | Play to learn, use language with your child. Sand, water, puzzles, art |
| 10:00 – 10:10: | Encourage your child to help at clean up time                          |
| 10:00 – 10:30: | Wash hands and prepare snack (*Volunteers to prepare snack)            |
|                | Eat snack  |
| 10:30 – 11:00: | Gym Time   |
| 11:00 – 11:10: | Book Time, Reading together  |
| 11:10 – 11:40: | Circle Time  |
| 11:40 – 11:50: | Quiet Play, puzzles, play dough and computer time                      |
| 11:50 – 12:00: | Clean up time  |
| 12:00          | Home time.<br>Thank You! See you soon                                  |



Courtesy of Lorie McDonald, Facilitator

## StrongStart BC Quick Quotes:

The following email was received by the Ministry of Education:

"I just wanted to acknowledge how wonderful the StrongStart BC program is. I am presently looking after a toddler and have 2 young teenagers of my own. (I wish this program was offered when my own children were small). Anyway, I really hope the program will continue to grow and be possible for future families of our province."

## Early Learning Book Review

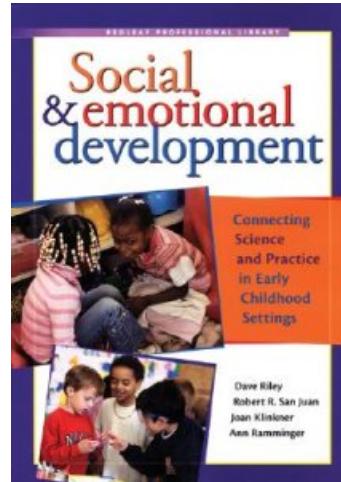
**Social & Emotional development: Connecting Science and Practice in Early Childhood Settings** (2008) by Dave Riley, Robert R. San Juan, Joan Klinkener, and Ann Ramminger. Published by Redleaf Press.

Holding babies while feeding them and playing *Simon Says* with children are important developmental practices that help babies and children form an attachment to their caregiver and regulate their behaviour.

With accessible language, this book examines common teaching practices in early childhood programs and the scientific research that supports them.

Key topics in the book include:

- how to help children form strong attachments with adults, and how doing so will foster feelings of security in them;
- the importance of peer relationships and how to help children learn to take turns, develop empathy, and act unselfishly;
- the three forms of self-regulation: controlling impulsive behavior, developing problem-solving skills, and learning to regulate emotions.



This book can be ordered from your local bookstore or online from Amazon.ca or ChaptersIndigo.ca.

### "Building on Success" was a Success!

#### **Building on Success: StrongStart BC Facilitators' Workshop March 7, 2008**

The Ministry of Education hosted a professional development day for StrongStart BC Facilitators on March 7, 2008 in Vancouver. An invitation was also sent to early childhood educators within school districts that were operating programs similar to StrongStart.

The workshop provided training on supporting Aboriginal families, promoting language development in children, and building relationships with families.

Over 100 people attended the provincial workshop, including 87 StrongStart BC Facilitators.

#### **Comments from StrongStart BC Facilitators:**

- "I am truly inspired to continue to work in the ECE field."
- "I wish I had heard Monique's insightful thoughts 20 years ago when I started my career!"
- "Great empowering and educational conference."
- "Thank you for this wonderful, inspiring, hospitable, well-organized day."
- "Was very informative, fun, and extremely beneficial to connect with others."
- "Thank you so much, I feel empowered and excited about our future and children!!"
- "Thank you so much, I am inspired."

## **It's Smart to Be Physically Active!**

Inactivity among children and youth is increasing in Canada, and even though British Columbia is one of the most active provinces, a large number of BC children are not active enough to achieve health benefits. Research has shown that exercise not only has physical benefits, but can also benefit your brain! A recent article in "Exchange Every Day" (<http://www.ccie.com/eed/issue.php?id=1962>.) stated the following: "After 14 weeks, the children who made the greatest improvement as measured by a standardized academic test and a test that measured their level of executive function — thinking processes that involve planning, organizing, abstract thought, or self-control — were those who spent 40 minutes a day playing tag and taking part in other active games designed by the researchers. The cognitive and academic gains for the 20-minute-a-day group were half as large."

It is important for all children to participate in quality physical activity, and for facilitators to share activity ideas with parents and caregivers. Encouraging adults and children to build physical activity into their day helps them acquire the knowledge and attitudes of how to be physically active for life.

LEAP BC™ provides children from birth to age five with a strong foundation in literacy, physical activity and healthy eating, through fun activities and play. This new program values the learning and bonding that happen when children and caregivers play together. For more information, go to the LEAP BC website at: [http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/leap\\_bc/](http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/leap_bc/)

## **Engage the Adults and Strengthen Your Program**

by Kelly Botz, facilitator  
Hollyburn StrongStart BC Early Learning Program  
West Vancouver, BC

We all do our best to provide a warm, nurturing, educational, fun environment for the children, but this is equally important for the adults that attend StrongStart BC programs. If the parents/caregivers feel welcomed and comfortable, and are included as a valued and vital component of the program, they will bring all their individual strengths, and what is the old saying? There is strength in numbers.

I look at the environment in my room as a way to engage both the children and the adults. When families first come through the door there are welcome signs in the eleven languages represented in our room.

In each of the designated learning areas I have laminated articles and mounted them on the wall to provide information to the adults on things such as explaining the importance of play, what children learn when building with blocks, or a list of healthy snacks that appeal to children.

The Parent Board has pamphlets on other resources available in the community and upcoming events, but I also add cartoons, poems, inspirational quotes that promote cooperation, sharing, belonging...humour. The adults appreciate being given a smile too!

One addition that has been instrumental in engaging the adults in my program is a Parent/Caregiver Skills Registry List. Adults were asked if there were any skills, interests, languages, crafts, musical talents they were willing to share with the group. So far this year we have had a parent presentation on the Mexican Day of the Dead, learned words in Spanish, and Japanese, had our own private concert from a Mom who is a concert pianist, enjoyed singing and dancing by two Musical Theatre students from Capilano College, and delighted in two incredible multicultural potluck lunches where everyone participated.

I think Jean-Nicolas Bouilly may have summed it up best in 1795 when he said, "*Whatever we possess becomes of double value when we have the opportunity of sharing it with others.*"

## **Tips for Encouraging Parent Involvement at StrongStart BC Centres Compiled from various StrongStart BC programs across the province**

### **Environment**

- Make sure that parents/caregivers feel welcome and comfortable.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable space for parents/caregivers and their child to read together.
- Place cue cards in the environment that list questions or comments that parents/caregivers may choose to use with their children. For example: "Can I play with you?", "What happens next?", "What else can you show me?", "How did you do that?", "What do you think?", "Give simple instructions" "Talk about shapes, numbers or colours", "Talk about feelings", "Let your child lead you", "Pretend along with your child", "Give your child choices", "Give names to things you see and do",
- Ask parents/caregivers if the centre's activities are ones that the child does in their home environment.
- Design activities that build on children's home experiences.

### **Model Best Practices**

- Teach parents that activities such as modeling reading behaviour and reading to their children increase children's interest in learning.
- Suggest that parents/caregivers ask their child to tell them a story about a picture they have drawn.
- Have children select books for their parent/caregiver to read to them.
- Ask parents/caregivers to narrate what their children are doing.
- Prompt parents/caregivers with questions for their children.

### **Encourage Participation**

- Encourage parents to be curious about their children's activities.
- Ask parents/caregivers what they would enjoy about the program.
- Ask parents/caregivers if they would change anything about the program.
- Lead group activities that involve both adults and children
- Suggest to parents that they "ask permission" from their child to play with them
- Encourage parents/caregivers to introduce themselves to other parents/caregivers, and ask that they assist their child in introducing themselves to other children
- Provide activities where the children lead the adults
- Provide Information
- Offer parents/caregivers information on child development, health, safety and nutrition, and adult-child communication.

### **Communication**

- Encourage parents/caregivers to talk with their child. The more you talk and the more words you use, the stronger a child's language skills will be.
- Encourage parents/caregivers to talk about what they are thinking. This will show children the importance of curiosity and how to be problem solvers.

### **Celebrate**

- Celebrate major milestones in the lives of families: a new baby, a lost tooth, learning a special song.

### **Keep these ideas in mind when working with parents/caregivers:**

Parents and caregivers have important perspectives about their children.  
All families have strengths.  
Cultural differences are both valid and valuable.

## StrongStart BC Facilitator Tip

### Parent Information Tree John Tod Elementary StrongStart BC



The tree was developed in partnership with Megan Young and Stacey Androsoff, 3rd year nursing students from Thompson Rivers University.

The students initially met with our families to explore their needs for community resources. The student then explored what was /is available in the community.

The tree was designed to be user friendly; the intent was to make resources readily available and to appeal to children in terms of classroom decor.

Families are responding to the material and making positive comments i.e. "I didn't know that ---- was available here, 'so I can just call by myself, I don't need to see a Dr or a social worker'

The children have made comments like "those are our bumble bees", "can we make flowers for the garden?"

We will add to the wall as/when we access further information and when families request additional information.

Prior to this wall we had information posted in the entrance hall but find that now it is in the classroom families are able to take a few moments to explore the wall while their children are involved in StrongStart BC activities.

### **Do you Yahoo! With other StrongStart BC Facilitators?**

Did you know that there is a Yahoo! Group just for StrongStart BC facilitators? This group was set up by one of the pilot facilitators. This is a place for sharing information, posting ideas, asking questions and offering support to each other in communities. Visit often at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/>. You must sign up to be a member of the group. Discussions on this site have included: suggestions for transitions, duties for facilitators, activities for parents, and even searches contact information.

Please contact Patty Apps, Riverview Elementary StrongStart BC facilitator for more information: [pattyapps@sd28.bc.ca](mailto:pattyapps@sd28.bc.ca)

### **Free Bus Passes for Income Assistance Clients Accessing StrongStart BC**

The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) provided approximately 700 parents with pre-school aged children who receive income assistance with free bus passes for three months to encourage families to utilize the StrongStart BC centre in their neighbourhood. MEIA sent a letter to every family receiving Income Assistance with preschool aged children in communities where a StrongStart BC centre is located and public transit is available.

The bus passes were distributed by the Bus Pass Program at MEIA. Clients on income assistance contacted a toll free phone number to receive their free bus pass. Bus passes were mailed directly to the client's home.

Due to the province-wide popularity of StrongStart BC programs, MEIA was only able to distribute 10 free bus passes per centre, so as not to overload the centres. Bus passes were provided on a first come, first serve basis. One bus pass per month was available for each family unit, for the months of April, May, and June 2008.

We hope that many families took advantage of this wonderful initiative and had the opportunity to experience a StrongStart BC early learning centre and the activities they offer.

### **Did you know?**

#### **Family Literacy Course at Vancouver Community College**

Partnering with Literacy BC, the Centre for Family Literacy and 2010 Legacies Now, Vancouver Community College is hosting a new Family Literacy Certificate Program. Designed for those who currently work or plan to work in family literacy, this certificate program will build on knowledge and skills in a wide range of areas that are key to high quality programs and services. Unique across Canada, this credential offers an excellent curriculum facilitated by leaders in the family literacy field.

Contact Information: Senior Program Coordinator: Gyda Chud

Program Assistant: Monica Hegberg, 604-443-8428

<http://www.vcc.ca/programs-courses/details.cfm?div=6&area=CSFAMILIT&prog=FAMLETCERT>

## Creative StrongStart BC Outreach Strategies and Events

Muheim Memorial Elementary StrongStart BC Early Learning Program, SD 54, Smithers  
Rae-Lynn Varga, Facilitator

- The first Tuesday of each month, the StrongStart BC program visits the local seniors housing complex and spends approximately one hour with them, doing activities, sharing snack and singing songs. The local seniors look forward each month to this time and it has been especially beneficial to the children. There are many benefits of children and seniors interacting and this has become a wonderful opportunity for both.
- The StrongStart BC program has reached out to the "hard to reach" families by hosting an afternoon where the community can come and visit the program. The facilitator, Rae-Lynn Varga, has made connections with kindergarten teachers, Aboriginal workers and other non-profit agencies in setting up a time where families that do not regularly attend can come. The centre had a tea, muffin and bannock event on March 12th with a drumming demonstration and an informal opportunity for families to meet the educator. As well the Aboriginal worker was also there to provide a level of trust and comfort for those families that would not necessarily come on their own. It was open to the entire community.



### Last but not Least:

- *Mentoring initiative revamp:* look for more information on the re-organization to the StrongStart BC Mentoring program in the fall.
- *Professional development for StrongStart BC facilitators:* Another professional development opportunity for StrongStart BC facilitators is being planned by the Ministry of Education. This opportunity will take place in the fall. Details will be provided in the late summer
- *Will your StrongStart BC program be operating in the summer?* Please let us know, as many families have been enquiring about StrongStart BC summer programs.
- Do you have any “Good News” stories about early learning in your community? Please share them with the Ministry so we can spread the good news!

**Do you have any ideas, tips or information for the BC Early Learning Network Newsletter? Contact Janet Powell via email: [Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Janet.Powell@gov.bc.ca) or phone (250) 387-5615**