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February 2009 Throne Speech

The Future of Early Learning

The province of British Columbia recognizes the importance of investing in early learning. This recognition is why the Early Childhood Learning Agency was asked to explore the feasibility of full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds and consider future optional full-day programs for four-year-olds and three-year-olds.

The province had hoped to be in a position to introduce a voluntary full-day kindergarten program for five-year olds this September. Regrettably, three factors will delay its introduction. Current economic circumstances, the need to develop appropriate space and the time to recruit more qualified educators means it is not feasible in 2009. However, the province is committed to its vision for

expanded early learning opportunities, including full-day kindergarten for every five-year-old in the province in a way that benefits children and parents/caregivers.

The feasibility work revealed that there are numerous considerations for implementing full-day kindergarten, including staffing, facilities, appropriate type of space, adequate resources, and timelines for appropriate implementation. Moving from half to full-day kindergarten will be a significant undertaking that will require substantial resources, including hundreds of new teachers. The feasibility work undertaken to date indicates that there is more work to do at the district and ministry level before the implementation of full-day kindergarten.



While there is still work to be done, the commitment remains to expand early learning programs, which includes continuing to add StrongStart BC early learning programs. There are currently 190 programs operating across the province, which includes StrongStart BC Outreach programs in four school districts.

New!

Streamlining of Early Learning Contracts

The Ministry of Education's Early Learning Branch is merging the 2009/2010 Early Learning Agreements with the Ready, Set, Learn, StrongStart BC Centre, and StrongStart BC Outreach Program Agreements. As a result, each school district will have one Agreement for all early learning programs (instead of four). This streamlining initiative will reduce the number of early learning contracts from 240 to 60. It will also reduce the environmental impact and help to reduce the administrative burden on school districts.



EDI Report: Documenting Impact and Action

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) recently published an interesting study called *The Early Development Instrument (EDI) in British Columbia: Documenting Impact and Action in Schools, Communities and Early Childhood Development* (January 2009). The full report is available at: http://www.earlylearning.bc.ca/documents/2009/EDI_in_BC_Jan_09.pdf

examined which interventions, parenting programs and/or care arrangements have enhanced "school readiness" as broadly assessed in all domains of child development using the EDI in the following school districts: Revelstoke, Central Okanagan, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Sunshine Coast, Boundary, Comox, Mission, Cowichan Valley, and Vancouver Island North.

(e.g. local agencies, district staff, consultants, etc.);
5. Trustee involvement.

The narratives in the qualitative study provide compelling evidence about how local communities used EDI data to help them plan program interventions. These interventions may be replicable in other communities, particularly in neighbourhoods with high vulnerability and worse than predicted results on the EDI.

This study provides valuable information for policy and program development to help achieve the goal of improving children's readiness for success in school.

The Association of BC School Trustees, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) and HELP partnered on this study to analyze 10 school districts where children's vulnerabilities have been reduced, as measured by the EDI.

Five themes emerged in all 10 districts:

1. A strong intersectoral early childhood development coalition;
2. A focus on the EDI results;
3. Multiple layers of programming and support focused on families;
4. Community leadership

The researchers

From Theory to Practice: A New Resource for Early Learning Programs

[Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice](#) is a companion to the [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#). *From Theory to Practice* provides ideas and suggestions to guide early learning practitioners in reflecting on the vision, principles and learning goals set out in the *Framework*. It also provides specific tools for using the *Framework* in practice. One such tool is Pedagogical Narration.

designed to be used along with the Framework in all early learning environments, including StrongStart BC programs.

Three post-secondary institutions (the University of Victoria, Selkirk College, and Northern Lights College) have partnered with the Ministry of Education to provide professional development to implement the Framework. This training for (ECEs), staff in ECE training institutions, and other service providers began in January 2009.

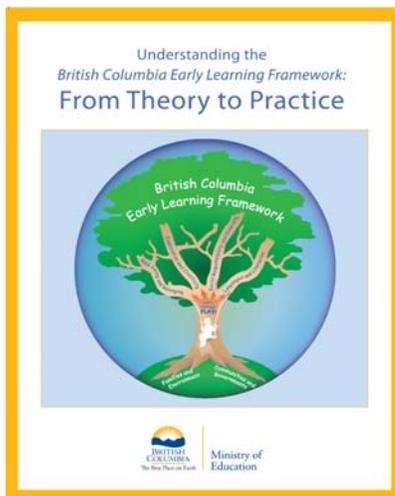
Information about training sessions is posted on The Ministry of Education's [website](#).

Workshop attendees should bring their copy of *From Theory to Practice* and the *Framework* to the training sessions.

On page 8 of this newsletter is an example of a Pedagogical Narration. Kim Ainsworth, the author of the narration, is a StrongStart BC facilitator, and attended a training session on the *Framework* earlier this year.

"Understanding how society can best support families and children in their early years is a multi-faceted task. One of the key tasks is to work backwards from communities that are clearly making progress (based upon positive changes in EDI scores over time) and asking "why?". The ten case studies included here follow this approach and are rich in insights that help answer the "why" question."

Dr. Clyde Hertzman
Director of HELP



From Theory to Practice is

Reminder:

The British Columbia Early Learning Framework and *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* 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

Early Learning Environments

The environment provided to young learners is an important aspect of their early experiences, whether at home, at school, or in community programs. Quality early learning environments support all aspects of development: physical, social, emotional, language, and cognitive. The physical environment is often referred to as the “third teacher”. A quality early learning environment is **rich, responsive, relevant, respectful** and engages all five senses. By taking time to reflect on these aspects, StrongStart BC facilitators can ensure the quality of their early learning environment.

A **rich** environment does not necessarily mean filling the room with expensive toys. A rich environment is full of a variety of learning opportunities that stimulate all five senses. Children are natural explorers and look for answers using everything that is available to them. A rich environment encourages children to challenge themselves and the theories they have about the world around them.

- Is the environment inviting and welcoming, to both children and adults?
- Are materials and activities open-ended?
- Does the environment contain a variety of colours and textures?
- Does the environment contain large open spaces and quiet intimate spaces for play?
- Does the environment engage all five senses?
- Do the materials and activities provoke thinking, engage creativity and allow for uncertainty?
- Do learning experiences challenge the children to try new ideas and test theories?

Responsive environments consider the developmental appropriateness for all the children who attend, regardless of their age, ability or interests. Children are active learners, and they learn in a variety of ways. StrongStart BC environments should be accessible for children and adults of all ages.

- Do learning centres support a variety of experiences?
- Are children and families encouraged to provide ideas for themes and materials?
- Are the activities and materials continually assessed and modified to ensure prolonged interest and age appropriateness?
- Are there enough materials so that several children can engage in play at the same time?

Culturally **relevant** environments reflect the families that use the program. Children who see familiar objects in a new setting may be encouraged to test new theories. Adults who see items that they value in the environment may feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar setting.

- Are their pictures that represent the cultures of the families who attend?
- Are there materials in the environment that reflect families’ home lives?
- Are families invited to participate in ways that are meaningful to them? Are families asked to share their culture and celebrations?
- Are there learning materials and activities that promote the understanding of diverse cultures?
- Do materials depict the community setting (i.e. urban or rural)?
- Do materials include many “real” items in place of toy replicas?

Respectful environments make children and families feel that they are welcome and safe. The environment should reflect pride in the program and show that each child and family is valued. Families should be encouraged to explore and take risks.

- Are children encouraged to explore and make their own choices?
- Are materials sturdy and safe?
- Are children’s ideas reflected in the centre?
- Do the activities and materials reflect non-stereotyped community members (i.e. picture books with women police officers)?
- Is the environment clean and well organized?

Early learning environments that are well thought-out and designed are engaging for children and keep families coming back.



A cozy book corner, sized for small children to cuddle up in, with a variety of reading materials.



Materials that stimulate all the senses and are relevant to what children see in the world around them.



The StrongStart BC environment should be of interest and accessible to adults and children alike.

Book Review: *Early Learning Environments that Work*; by Rebecca Isbell and Betty Exelby

Rich early learning environments are vital for children to get the most out of their learning experiences. *Early Learning Environments that Work* explores how you can use furniture arrangement, color, materials, storage, lighting, and more to encourage learning. Early learning spaces and activity centers that support children's independence and decision-making allow them to make the environment their own.

Each chapter in this book provide the reader with detailed illustrations and photographs to help set up or arrange early learning environments.

The authors have selected the illustrated examples in this book to stimulate imagination

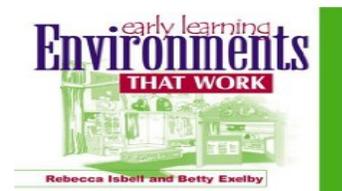
and creativity. Throughout the book are multitudes of practical, simple and creative options called "places to begin" which are designed to help generate ideas.

During the Illuminate sessions on the StrongStart BC evaluation, by Dr. Janet Mort made reference and gave a strong recommendation to *Early Learning Environments that Work*. This book is an innovative guide for early childhood educators who want to make the most of their physical environment. It provides ideas on how facilitators can transform their StrongStart BC room into an engaging and meaningful space that will stimulate the development of young

children.

The book's 10 appendices include an inventory form, equipment checklist, team inventory, storage ideas, and an anthropometric chart for a child-scaled environment.

This book is published by Gryphon House Press, which can be accessed on the web at: www.gryphonhouse.com.



Success by Six Aboriginal Coordinators

Success by Six is a joint initiative of United Ways, Credit Unions, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and community leaders. The initiative is dedicated to ensuring that children ages 0 to 6 have access to programs that help ensure healthy growth and development. The Aboriginal Engagement strategy has developed a network of Aboriginal Coordinators. Contact the Success by Six Aboriginal Coordinator in your area to learn more about this initiative and how StrongStart BC programs can make connections with the Aboriginal community.

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Linking your Sensory Table with the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*

Sensory experiences are an important aspect of the StrongStart BC early learning environment. These experiences can provide relevant and meaningful experiences for young children. Sensory tables address all domains of development – social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive – and support many learning goals of the British Columbia Early Learning Framework. Adults can facilitate play at the sensory table by asking open ended questions, and adding new material. Water and sand are the most common materials used in a sensory table, but almost any material can be used. Interesting ideas include: Styrofoam packing material, snow, pine cones, pebbles, shredded paper, or chestnuts.

The learning opportunities at a sensory table can easily be linked to the early learning goals in the British Columbia Early Learning Framework.

Early Learning Area	Learning Goal	Question to Consider	Learning Opportunity
Well-being and Belonging	Feel valued for and explore their own strategies for learning.	In what ways are children's natural curiosity and desire to make sense of the world around them encouraged?	Children can suggest new materials to add to the sensory table.
Exploration and Creativity	Explore the world using their bodies and all their senses.	How are children encouraged to use their bodies to make sense of the world (e.g., through using versatile tools, materials, and equipment)?	Children use fine motor skills to manipulate materials such as measuring cups and funnels.
Languages and Literacies	Develop diverse language abilities and the capacity to communicate with others in many ways.	What opportunities do children have for one-to-one language interaction, both with adults and other children?	Children talk to adults and other children. They may ask themselves questions about what is happening or talk with another child.
Social Responsibility and Diversity	Express a positive regard for others and respect for self, others, and property.	How, and in what contexts, are children encouraged to initiate, maintain, and enjoy relationships with other children (e.g., turn-taking, problem-solving, negotiating, helping others, understanding other people's points of view, attitudes, and feelings)?	As more than one child can play at the sensory table, conflicts may result. Social skills are practiced and honed as children deal with conflicts.



A sensory table that includes natural elements helps children to develop an understanding of the natural environment.



Make the sensory table accessible for children of all ages, to engage in multi-age or multi-generational play.



Sensory materials should reflect what is happening in children's lives.

SD 71 Created a Unique Activity for Signing In to StrongStart BC



**School District 71 (Comox Valley):
StrongStart BC Website**

School District 71 (Comox Valley) has created a comprehensive website, focused on their StrongStart BC early learning programs. The website includes sections on each StrongStart BC program in the district, community events, early learning activities, photos, recipes, libraries, newsletter, and useful links for parents.

The opening page of the website describes StrongStart BC early learning programs and provides contact information for all three of School District 71's StrongStart BC programs. This includes the location of the program, the school principal, the facilitator, and the days and hours of operation.

A section of the website is dedicated to "A Day at StrongStart". From signing in, to snack time, to story time, to gym time, to good bye time, parents and caregivers who access the site will gain a thorough understanding of what the daily programming looks like.

<http://web.sd71.bc.ca/strongstart/>

**"One Stop Shop" for Health Information
New Ministry of Health Website**

HealthLink BC

The Ministry of Health has created a "one stop shop" for British Columbians to access health information. This new service, HealthLink BC, is accessible by phone by dialing only three numbers - **8-1-1** - or online at www.HealthLinkBC.ca. This easy access information is available to everyone, 24 hours a day,

for non-emergency health information.

Users of this service can speak with a nurse online or on the phone regarding symptoms, consult with a pharmacist on medication questions, or get healthy eating advice from a dietitian. Also on the website, information is provided on the publicly

funded health services and resources in local communities.

The website includes sections on "Hot Topics", "Top Searches", and "Key Health Tools" and also includes the ability for users to search for health services and resources in their local area.

YAKING Newsletter:

Great book and story ideas for your early learning program

YAACS (Young Adults and Children's Services) is a section of the British Columbia Library Association. Members of this association include librarians, teacher-librarians and other library workers interested in services to youth in British Columbia. The purpose of this Association is to promote the exchange of ideas among library personnel who work with Children and Young Adults.

One way this Association promotes the exchange of information is through their YAACING newsletter. YAACING is published four times per year. Information in these newsletters includes book reviews and suggestions, articles, practical tips for storytime success and other news related to children's services within the library network.

Past issues of YACCING can be found online at: <http://www.bcla.bc.ca/YAACS/page/yaacing.aspx>



StrongStart BC ECE Recruitment Program

To assist and support District's to recruit Early Childhood Educators (ECE) for StrongStart BC early learning centres, the Ministry is leading an ECE recruitment project. StrongStart BC career information sessions are being held at ECE training institutions across the province. At these sessions, information is provided on StrongStart BC early learning programs and how future Early Childhood Educators can become involved in the program. Sessions are also being offered at local ECEBC branch meetings and to ECE faculty.

Information that is provided at these sessions and on the Ministry's website includes background information on

StrongStart BC early learning programs and working in a StrongStart BC program.

Questions are asked and answered, including:

“What would my job duties be as a StrongStart facilitator?”

“What do I need to become a StrongStart BC facilitator?”

What's in it for me?

“What kinds of activities are offered at StrongStart BC centres?”

The website also includes some testimonial statements from StrongStart BC facilitators.

Promotional material and a link on the Ministry of Education website for career information are also available at

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/strongstart_bc/.

To make this recruitment activity effective, the Ministry is requesting the assistance of school districts. In addition to current job posting venues, please post StrongStart BC career opportunities on the BC Public School Employers' Association website

<http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/acces/index.html>. This will allow

any prospective Early Childhood Educators to search for StrongStart BC opportunities across the Province within a single website.

“I like watching the parents and children learning together. When parents and children share an experience it means so much more to everyone.”- Cari, Red Bluff Lhtako StrongStart BC centre

Creative StrongStart BC Events: Wednesday Get Togethers

On Wednesdays, the West Heights Elementary StrongStart BC program joins the kindergarten class for a music and signing session. Both the StrongStart BC facilitator, Diana McCall, and the Kindergarten teacher, Hilary Kroeplin, are passionate about music but each have a different style of presenting music to the children. They decided to join forces once a week for some musical fun. They had to be creative, since neither of their classrooms has the space for a piano, and West Heights School has no free rooms available.... so they brought the piano to the hallway between the classes and then all the children and adults gathered in the hall to sing around the piano. Space is a bit tight, but it is so much fun that no one seems to mind. Afterwards, both groups go to the gym together.

Of special note, 8 of the children attending the StrongStart BC program are ESL students who will be in Ms. Kroeplin's class come September. What a great introduction into school!



Aya's Mother's Reflections



"Aya was thrilled to have her story and photo given to her and it's up on display in our house. It's her first story! I've read it to her a few times now. I could see how much she was enjoying playing with the felt pieces."

I asked Aya's mother if she had also noticed the theme of matching up babies and mother animals:

"I'm not sure why Aya had to match the babies and moms up but that's how she is. She worries all the time that Mommy will leave her behind. Maybe this comes from being in a family of four children and it makes me feel guilty! In the morning, she's the first one ready for school because she's worried that I will leave without her. I've never left her and I've told her that I never will so I'm not sure why. She just needs to be right beside me. She has to have all her teddies in bed with her at night because if there's just one, she tells me he'll be cold."

I told Aya's mother that this seemed to speak to Aya's sensitive nature. I also told her that it showed empathy that she would be thinking from her teddy bears' perspective as well as from the perspective of a baby animal needing its mother.

Aya's mother agreed. She said that Aya is so caring of other's feelings in the family that she will give up her own possessions and do without to make others happy. Aya's mother worries about this and tries to help Aya protect her own rights too.

StrongStart BC Pedagogical Narration:

The following is a pedagogical narration developed at the Sidney Elementary StrongStart BC program by the facilitator, Kim Ainsworth. This narration features Aya, a 4 year old girl who often attends the program with her mother.

When Aya and her brother entered StrongStart, Aya immediately noticed the felt board and safari animals shapes I had set up on the table. Aya began to move the pieces around on the felt board. She looked completely engrossed in this activity. I sat down beside her and asked if she would like to make up a felt story and have me write down the words. She agreed.

Aya: "The baby elephant was lost and looking for his mommy. He saw an elephant and he came far and didn't find her. And the people came out and took pictures and then more people came in the bus and then a snake came and he went there (Aya points) and then the lion went under the tent sleeping. That guy (Aya points to gorilla) is looking at the snake. Then the deer came and his mom came. The jealous baby. . ."

Kim: "Why is the baby jealous?"

Aya: "He can't climb."

Kim: "Can someone else climb?"

Aya: "Yes," and points to the gorilla. "A big . . . kangaroo came."

Kim: "Oh, that's called a jaguar."

Aya: "Where's the baby? The baby jaguar came here. He jumped up." Aya searches through the felt shapes for the baby rhino as she has the adult rhino in her hand. She picks up a piece, looks at it carefully, and says to me excitedly, "This is the baby

rhino!" She points to his small horn. "The baby deer climbed here (on bus) then his mom came."

I read the story aloud to Aya. She gave me a big smile and looked so very proud!

My Reflections

I often tell felt stories during circle time. The children love stories in this format yet it takes a great deal of their self-control, and often adult help, to keep the children from touching the pieces while I tell the stories. I was looking for a means of honouring the children's natural curiosity about the felt shapes and creativity when I set up this invitation.

I had also been considering the needs of the pre-Kindergarten children in my program, such as Aya, and was looking for ways to encourage the children's own storytelling skills and connecting this with written literacy. It felt very self-satisfying to see Aya show such enthusiasm for this activity.

I was pleased and felt privileged to have a quiet moment to share one-on-one with Aya. Aya is a very quiet and timid child who stays close by her mother's side and I knew that this was a statement of her growing trust in me. It was rewarding to watch her focus so intently and joyfully in her play and surprising that she had so much to say. I was aware

that in the moment, her play was the focus and the "story" was simply an aside. I wondered too about Aya's experience in telling stories to others. With more experience in hearing her stories told would she refine her skills? Would her enjoyment of this activity grow? Would this activity become more meaningful to her?

I was also curious about Aya's desire to match up baby and mother animals in her story as this seemed a theme. Aya looked so concerned when she could not immediately find the baby hippo to go with the mother hippo. Did this reflect Aya's own need for the security of her mother's presence? Was it comforting to her to match the babies and mothers together.

While my intention had been to sit silently and simply transcribe Aya's words, when she told me one of the animals was, "jealous," I had to check her understanding of this word. I was surprised that a four year old would understand this emotion. Indeed, it seemed from her response that she did. As Aya comes from a family of four children, I wondered if this is perhaps an emotion she has experienced and talked about in her family. While I worried in the moment that my interjections might have detracted Aya, upon reflection, it seems that these did not.

StrongStart BC Pedagogical Narration, Continued from page 8 Links to the British Columbia Early Learning Framework



Goal of Well-Being and Belonging:

In enjoying an activity one-on-one with me, Aya and I had a chance to deepen our relationship. I believe this will be important for Aya when she starts Kindergarten at the same school in the fall. Separating from her mother could be difficult for her and it could give her more security to have another trusted adult in the school.

- Aya was allowed to direct this activity herself. This conveyed my value in her play and also allowed her to test out her own ideas.
- This experience brought me closer to Aya's mother and deepened my understanding of her experience as Aya's mother.

Goal of Exploration and Creativity:

- Aya was encouraged to express her own creativity through the story-making, using a new medium.
- Aya was encouraged to make her learning visible by having an adult record her words and her parents displaying her story at home.

Goal of Language and Literacies:

- By recording the story, written language was meaningfully incorporated as an extension of Aya's play.
- By hearing her own words, Aya can practice refining her story-telling skills.
- The adults conveyed their value of Aya's words through this experience.

Facilitators' Ideas for Future Planning

- Continue to explore story scripting with the children using other felt shapes, drawings, etc. Gauge interest with older children in their collaborative writing of a puppet play which they could act out at a circle time.
- Ask Aya's permission in displaying her story in the StrongStart room with goals of increasing Aya's sense of well-being and belonging in our program as well as generating the interest of other children's in this activity. Could we create a story wall with the children's stories?

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