

Building Blocks for the Future

A profile of an early childhood education dual credit program and student

Meet future educator Olivia Elliott

Olivia Elliott, a Fraser Valley High School student, grew up surrounded by teachers, principals, and education administrators.

“My mom, dad, and aunts are all in that world, and I wasn’t planning to go into our ‘family business.’”

Then, one day, when she was 16, Olivia volunteered at a local organization working with young children and had a realization.

“I was helping this young child build with Lego when it hit me: ‘Oh my goodness—I am a teacher.’”

This changed everything; Olivia knew what she wanted to do for a career and was determined to make it happen.

Fortunately for Olivia, in 2023, the Chilliwack and Fraser Cascade school districts, jointly participating in B.C.’s Early Childhood Education Dual Credit Project, were developing a local early childhood education training program.

Her mother, Heather Elliott, is a district coordinator for career education but Olivia had to apply just like every other student.

“I was so excited when I found out I had been accepted. I knew that this would move my life forward and that I could be working with kids sooner!”

Provincial investment inspires local design

Dual credit empowers grades 11 and 12 students to take tuition-free college and university courses that count toward both



their high school diplomas and future post-secondary credentials. While school districts and their post-secondary partners choose what dual credit to offer, the Ministry of Education and Child Care directed an additional \$6.3 million between 2022 and 2025 to enable them to design and launch early childhood education programs to serve local students for years to come.

In response, the Chilliwack and Fraser Cascade school districts chose to work together and partner with the University of the Fraser Valley. Their resulting local program includes four courses: Communicating Professionally to Academic & Workplace Audiences; Introduction to Early Childhood Education; Introduction to Observing and Recording Behaviour of Young Children; and Human Development I.

The classes are held at the university and, once a week, students go to À:lmèlhàwtwxw Early Education Centre to observe a real early learning environment and workplace.

A local program defined by student supports

“We are now on our second cohort, which is 20 students strong, and we feel fortunate for how well it’s gone since the beginning,” said Heather Elliott. “Maybe that’s because we’ve been very focused on how best to support the students.”

She said, “We tried to remove as many barriers as possible.”

Students were provided with bus passes to get to the university and daycare centre. Textbooks were provided at no charge and those accessed online were printed and bound for any student without reliable internet or a computer.

“We put aside any assumptions and made sure we understood all the things that might stop our students from participating and succeeding.”

Following up with Olivia

While Olivia went into the program ready for a challenge, the program was more challenging than she expected. “All of a sudden, I was a university student and needed to adapt,” she said. “Even with the support of my teachers, the program co-ordinators, and the instructors at UFV, I had to manage my time, and I had to step up and do the work.”

Advice from Olivia for other grades 11 and 12 students considering this program is to also be mindful of work-life balance and give yourself space to process your response to the experience.

“No matter how prepared you think you are, there will be emotions and it’s key to let yourself feel them.”

In addition, Olivia urges students to actively participate in class, even if you feel intimidated.

She said, “Remember that everyone is there to learn, and the more you engage and put effort into the classes, the more you get out of them.”

Olivia also shared that, inspired by her Métis heritage, she is interested in Indigenous perspectives: a holistic way of teaching that honours Indigenous knowledge, culture, language, and traditions, and aims to foster respect, reconciliation, and a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing.

“When I graduate, I am going to finish the ECE certificate,” said Olivia, “and then I will get a Bachelor of Education.”

With a vision for her future that includes multiple post-secondary credentials, Olivia is putting her learning and career plan together, like so many Lego pieces.

“This program has given me a real jump start on my future.”



To learn more about dual credit in British Columbia, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/dual-credit

To learn more about early childhood professionals, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/childcare/ecestrategy