

# Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education

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## 2013 Exemplary Practices

Catalogue and ISSN numbers:

lu1-3/2013-1E-PDF

1929-7866



## Exemplary Practices 2013

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### Welcome



2013 marked the 20th anniversary of the [Prime Minister's Awards \(PMA\) for Teaching Excellence](#). Running in parallel, since 2002, the [PMAs for Excellence in Early Childhood Education \(ECE\)](#) have honoured remarkable educators from across Canada. This incredible journey has involved over 1,600 award recipients from all provinces and territories, five prime ministers, more than 1,200 schools and centres, thousands of students, and an unquantifiable amount of passion and dedication that has already been passed on to another generation. Highlights of this two decades-long celebration of excellence in education can be found in a [short video](#).

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instil in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technologies to better equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in a 21st century society and economy. The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education honour exceptional ECEs who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation young children need to make the best possible start in life. Each recipient's [biography](#) highlights the innovative practices of some of Canada's most inspirational educators.

Educators may receive one of two Prime Minister's Awards: the *Certificate of Excellence* (national) and the *Certificate of Achievement* (regional). Certificate of Excellence winners are brought to Ottawa to receive their award from the Prime Minister and to participate in a variety of activities, perhaps most importantly, to share their innovative ideas and best teaching practices.

This sharing takes place in a forum open to other educators called "Teacher Talk". Topics for discussion are drawn from recipient's nomination packages and are based on what they feel are their best and most transferable teaching practices. Reflecting the growing trend in Canada toward integration, recipients of both the PMA for Teaching Excellence and for Excellence in Early Childhood Education took part in the same forum this year. Topics for 2013 were: *Using Technology to Connect and Empower*; *Teaching to Inspire and Engage*; *Enabling Success in all Students*; *The Language of Learning*; and, *Teaching beyond the Classroom*. Summaries of these **best practices**, as well as links for the **resources** these educators use regularly in their classrooms and childcare centres can be found in this publication.

As unique as each of the 2013 recipients are, what they all share in common is a tremendous passion for teaching and an incredible commitment to the students and children in their care. The final speaker of the day, teaching excellence recipient Gina Wong, summed up her fellow speaker's stories with the following found poem drawn from their presentations:

*Everything worth doing is worth doing well.  
Teachers are facilitators and co-learners.  
Teaching is more than the outcomes.  
If they don't learn the way you teach, teach the way they learn.  
Give respect to get respect.  
Inspire and explore to promote cognitive discussions.  
Do not be afraid to try something new: take big bold risks in your own learning.  
See the kids in front of you.  
Kids have inspired me to connect more with others and to bring fun things to them.  
"There but for the grace of God go I".  
My learning is incorporated into my students' learning.  
Educational empowerment by putting needs of students first.*

*Create a living classroom by creating a sense of belonging.  
Every child has a soul - celebrate the moments that take your breath away.  
A place to share language lives in a multicultural and multilingual society.  
Find their voice through their lived experience.  
They gave me the confidence.  
Teach from the heart to touch the hearts of the students.  
Learning goes beyond the classroom and creates memories.  
Value the voice in the learning and the vehicles of learning.  
Make a change in the community.  
Find passion in their lives and joy in the journey.*

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education are administered by Industry Canada in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Health Canada, The Public Health Agency of Canada, and with the generous support of the RBC Foundation. For information about this program, its partners and recipients, please [contact the program office](#).

Date modified: 2014-03-27

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## Early Learning and Equality for All Children



[Lucille Gilliland](#)

**Southwest Daycare and Learning Centre, Inc.**

Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan

**Type of setting:** Childcare and Early Learning Centre for 18 months to 12 year

I am writing on a topic that is truly close to my heart: providing early learning and child care to children with special rights (special needs) and who are medically fragile. I've always been fascinated with children's development, especially how they think and learn. I have discovered that seeing life through a child's eyes is very fascinating and fun. Working in an early learning program

gives me daily contact with some of the most interesting people on earth; our children.

To me, children are fascinating, wise, funny and extremely honest. Those qualities make my life's work very engaging, rewarding and challenging. Together with children, their families, and other early childhood educators we have been able to share and support one another in different ways to provide care for our children with special rights and who are medically fragile. This specialized care and early learning is often forgotten about in program planning and not provided due to fear of insufficient training or financial support coming into the early childhood education programs. We need to teach our communities about our children so that they can know when to get involved. It takes a village to raise a child.

Throughout my experience in working with children with special rights I have found that interaction with children without special needs can be mutually beneficial. For parents of children with complex medical needs, the challenge of finding quality child care and early learning programs can seem overwhelming. They don't want to limit their children to only being able to interact with children who have disabilities, but would still like to have their children cared for in an all-inclusive early learning environment. Children with disabilities, as well as those who are able-bodied, can enjoy learning and exploring alongside one another. It is important that an early childhood educator have opportunities in specialized training to assist with structuring a learning environment and facilitating social situations that maximize the physical and social inclusion. The programs that are developed for children with special needs should be tailored to each individual and closely monitored as the child grows, learns and gains new skills. This ensures that they are meeting the child's developmental needs and ever changing goals. Every child, regardless of ability, participates in all daily activities of the early learning environment.

As an early childhood educator, I would like to encourage all other early childhood educators to be strong advocates for the child care and early learning profession and find creative ways to promote inclusion. Parents should be supported in advocating for their medically fragile children and we can guide them through a network of resources to community organizations, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, medical social workers, early childhood psychologists and other professionals. I've even had these professionals or representatives from organizations come to visit the children at the centre, ensuring they receive necessary help in a timely and consistent manner. It is important to assist families by integrating family support services in ways that members of the community can also become educational partners. All children are our future regardless of their abilities and it is our responsibility to prepare them for it. I believe that Canada's natural resources are our children.

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## Creating a Living Classroom



[Shawna Miller-Poitras](#)

**North Okanagan Child Care Society**

Vernon, British Columbia

**Type of setting:** Child Care Centre for 4 years

Children's sense of self-worth and belonging are strengthened through the process of creative inquiry and the relationships they make throughout their learning journey. Adults and children work together to build meaningful relationships, make community connections, develop appreciation for the natural world and participate in opportunities for citizen engagement. A living classroom creates a learning community.

Educators have put a great deal of thought into the design of both indoor and outdoor spaces. Inside, children are greeted with a relaxing environment filled with natural objects, loose parts and beautiful things. Often world music is played in the background and the daily routine is flexible with the needs of the group. Outside, the playground is a mix of real tools and natural materials designed to challenge children. Logs, large branches, and river rocks are put into the area so that children may test their physical abilities to jump, balance and climb. The ground is covered in sand and access to water provides a myriad of possibilities. Children are intrinsically motivated to explore and manipulate objects—much social interaction happens as they discuss what they want to do with the materials. Projects develop as interests emerge—and critical thinking unfolds—working with real purpose and deep concentration. Children work together and the open ended materials provided allow them to imagine and create. Educators observe, listen and reflect on ways to scaffold learning.

Children need to spend a great deal of time outdoors, immersed in nature, to truly develop an appreciation for nature. When children explore and learn about the natural world they feel a sense of peace and connectedness with all living things, and start developing a sense of stewardship towards the Earth. We strive to provide many outdoor experiences that focus on the beauty of the season.

Relationships are also essential—we create a positive classroom culture by modeling caring and sharing. The principles of respect, trust and responsibility are deeply rooted in our curriculum. Children are accountable for what they say and how they act. Children are responsible for many of the daily routines by participating in making snacks, recycling and laundry. We hold gatherings and talk about how we feel—educators gently guide children so they learn what respect means and how to trust in themselves and each other.

Children connect to their world around them by getting to know the parks, beaches and city. We take regular walks, travel by public transit, and visit local businesses, museums and galleries. We also actively seek out individuals and agencies to form partnerships that are relevant to our group activities, and have partnered with the local nature centre and the local high school in a mentorship program. We participate in an intergenerational program, perform in festivals and volunteer for environmental projects. When children explore and learn about their culture and community, they feel like they belong and start developing a sense of caring for others.

We build children's capacities by giving them the opportunity to positively contribute in the classroom, community and natural environment. Children learn that through relationships and care of others, they MAKE a difference. These experiences give rise to a genuine sense of accomplishment, pride and self-worth. Creating a living classroom is pedagogy of belonging.

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## Changing Lives



[Shyrose Nurmohamed](#)

**Rise and Shine Montessori**

Richmond, British Columbia

**Type of setting:** Group Child Care Center for 30 months to 5 years

"Your children are not your children.  
 They are the sons and daughters of  
 Life's longing for itself.  
 They come through you but not from you,  
 And though they are with you yet they  
 Belong not to you...  
 You are the bows from which your children  
 As living arrows are sent forth..."

*-Khalil Gibran*

Khalil Gibran's poem succinctly reminds us of this great opportunity we, as caregivers, are honoured with—to provide children with the tools they will need to make choices to guide them to become positive, contributing members of society.

My work with children draws from the teachings of our current great masters, such as Eckhart Tolle, Wayne Dyer, Don Miguel Ruiz and Gordon Neufeld as well as my own personal experiences in life, having lived in three different countries; Africa, England and presently Canada. So how does one begin this monumental task of empowering our children to ensure lifelong success?

At Rise & Shine Montessori, we begin by interviewing the parents of the child to gauge the child's personality, temperament, experiences and needs. Thereafter, we observe the child to customize a learning program and establish objectives and goals that foster reading, writing, mathematics, as well as acquiring a broad base of general knowledge including science, social studies, music, art, yoga, meditation and daily life skills before he/she enters kindergarten. The challenge is always to make the program fun and find commonalities that make it inclusive of all the children, as well as presenting it in such a way that inspires a love of learning while connecting with others.

As human beings have a need to be loved and feel worthwhile. We live in a society that has certain expectations. Therefore, we also need to learn coping mechanisms that emulate appropriate behaviour. The best way to achieve this is to try and conserve the living-in-the-present-moment skill that children already have. As adults, we tend to bring our past into the present and worry about the future, thus losing the amazing momentum and mindfulness of the present moment.

We teach children to live with integrity. There is only one rule at Rise & Shine Montessori: RESPECT... for ourselves, the people around us and our environment. As our school song affirms, "we are always kind and gentle, we are always mindful..." Children are encouraged to always do their best. As our school motto declares, "Be yourself, but be your best self." Everyone's best is different every day. Motivating children to ask questions and inspiring them to find answers through their own inherent natural curiosity, fosters creativity and experimentation; problem solving skills that are important throughout life.

Last but not least, we teach children to think from love. This is paramount in building trust, cohesiveness as well as confidence. We must remember every child has a soul. To be empowered with love gives one's being the purpose and courage to move forward at times of adversity and celebrate the moments that take our breath away. Everything in life that is worth doing is worth doing well!

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## Supporting the Language Lives of Young Children and Families in Our Early Childhood Classrooms



**Angelique Sanders**

**Ryerson University School of Early Childhood Studies Early Learning Centre**  
 Toronto, Ontario

**Type of setting:** Laboratory childcare centre for 1.5 to 6 years

"Our classroom door is open to all languages. Knowing how important languages are, we support and promote bilingualism."

– Chumak-Horbatsch (2012, p.91)

In my experience in working with young children (four months to six years), families and student teachers, I interact with many people who are immigrants to Canada and who have language lives beyond our classrooms. I strive for a classroom that is inclusive for all, where my colleagues and I establish a warm and welcoming environment where everyone comes to play, learn, care and have mutual respect. We work with the families to understand their children's language and literacy needs in order to help them feel included and supported in our early childhood classrooms.

I can relate as I am an immigrant to Canada and a bilingual speaker of Dutch and English. At the beginning of my early childhood career, I used to interact mainly in English and then I began including different languages in my classroom practice starting with my heritage language of Dutch. I noticed the children were fascinated with hearing another language spoken or signed, and having stories read or signed in a different language. We started having fun with languages as we promoted multilingualism.

Each day, I communicate with the children and families as they arrive in and depart from our centre, often trying to say hello and goodbye in their home language and English. As I continue to explore how to use different languages in my classroom practice over many years, I seek fun and creative ways throughout the day to include the children's home languages, such as singing songs, counting, making up word games and reading stories in different languages, often in partnership with the children's families.

I have always had a curiosity for languages and with the help of a new approach called LAP (Linguistically Appropriate Practice) it continues to shift my practice from a monolingual approach to a multilingual approach. In 2011, I was introduced to LAP through a study conducted in our laboratory child care centre. LAP not only provides an overview of the language and literacy needs of young immigrant children, it also provides a new classroom practice for how to support these needs through a series of language activities. My colleagues and I have been including many of the LAP activities in our classrooms and our centre.

The children are excited to participate in the different LAP activities as they learn new ways to express themselves while having fun with languages. All children "will affirm their language identities, discover new worlds, and perhaps express an interest in learning a new language" (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, 100) while engaging in the LAP activities. They are showing a sense of confidence and pride when they share or when they hear and see their languages represented in their classrooms. Often we hear, "That's me. That's my language." Or "My daddy speaks that." Other times it is the smile on a child's face when a story is read in their home language that speaks volumes.

Our centre and my classroom is a place where languages are celebrated whether it is English, French, Sign or other home languages that the children, families, teachers and student teachers bring into the centre and classroom. Another example is our hallway Home Language Tree which celebrates each season with our community adding leaves with the word of the season in their home language. I am enthusiastic in continuing this linguistic journey together with our community to support our language lives as we strive for a multilingual, multi-literate and multicultural environment.

**Resource:**

Chumak-Horbatsch, R. (2012) Linguistically Appropriate Practice: A Guide for Working with Young Immigrant Children

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## Emergent Curriculum: How Art is used as a Language



Justin West

**Peter Green Hall Children's Centre**

Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Type of setting:** Licensed full time childcare centre for 3.5 to 5 years

Fear and dread washed over me. Never before had a child's request caused such a reaction. For most people it would have been an innocuous enough activity—copy her drawing. I'm a deft hand at painting, mixed media is a cinch, but drawing has always caused me endless hours of imperfect offerings. Having spent the night before frustrated by a similar task for my Masters program, I felt the universe was having a full belly laugh at my expense. A simple

rainbow drawn by a four year-old was about to teach me about the flexible nature of an emergent curriculum.

In my many years in the field of early childhood education, I have seen the impact of an emergent curriculum—children are engaged because the lessons learned stem from their interests and curiosities. Such programs empower the children by taking the knowledge they have already acquired and use it to help them teach others, as well as allowing for additional information to be included in which they may not be aware. Art weaves into these lessons with ease – seeing some of the children in my centre, Peter Green Hall Children's Centre, painting while on their backs underneath a table, I was able to teach them about the Sistine Chapel and Michelangelo.

The children are fond of going out into the community and engaging with local artists and making connections with the local art university who allow the children to see art in progress, speak with artists, and have even agreed to come work with the children in their space to encourage creativity, understanding and art appreciation.

Problem solving and critical thinking skills are often required to resolve an issue, but facing it straight on can be daunting. We employ the skill set of breaking it down into its most basic parts/shapes and drawing each so we can figure out how to make it work—the drawing then becomes a tool they can use in future in their problem solving arsenal.

I specifically marry emergent curriculum and art because together they help foster a non-verbal language for everyone to express difficult concepts and emotions. Let's return to the rainbow drawing and my lesson learned—no matter what the drawing (read: task), it can be taken apart piece by piece—the line spacing, the curves, the materials, and the right space for the work. Intuitively the little girl knew what she wanted—a replica of her rainbow on yellow paper in a selection of markers by her teacher. We worked together, she had some authority in doling out instructions and I learned that confidence has a lot to do with how easily a task can be completed. Consequently, the homework I needed to do benefitted from a better space to work, the correct materials and in no small part, confidence.

Ultimately learning and teaching are intertwined, the children and myself are involved in a feedback loop that drives knowledge, understanding and in my centre an artistic language that fosters empowerment, trust, openness, respect and space to try new things and explore the wider world.

### Resources:

Vecchi, V. (2010). Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the role and potential of ateliers in Early Childhood Education.

Reynolds, P. (2004). Ish.

Gemini, L., & Topal, C. (1999). Beautiful Stuff: Learning with found Materials.

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### Resources

- [Centre on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\) learning modules \(Second Step and Tucker Turtle\)](#)
- [Edward De Bono](#)
- [Linguistically Appropriate Practice \(LAP\)](#)
- [Moe the Mouse](#)
- [Reggio Emilia Approach](#)
- [Seeds of Empathy](#)
- [StopaBully.ca](#)

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- [Health Canada](#)
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# Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education

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## About us

Launched in 1993, the Prime Minister's Awards (PMA) for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instil in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technologies to better equip their students with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in a 21st century society and economy. Running in parallel since 2002, the PMA for Excellence in Childhood Education honour outstanding and innovative early childhood educators who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation children need to make the best possible start in life. Since the creation of the Program, over 1,600 remarkable teachers and educators were honoured and more than 1,200 schools and centres have been recognized.

The PMA for Excellence in Childhood Education are administered by Industry Canada on behalf of the Prime Minister and in partnership with [Employment and Social Development Canada](#), [Health Canada](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

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## Awards

The Awards, offered at the **Certificate of Excellence (national)** and **Certificate of Achievement (regional)** levels, carry cash prizes of \$5,000 and \$1,000 respectively. Each recipient receives a pin, as well as a letter and a certificate signed by the Prime Minister.

Certificates of Excellence are awarded to the five top-ranked early childhood educators and up to ten of the next top-ranked nominees each receive a Certificate of Achievement. At least one award (Excellence or Achievement) is designated for each of the following regions: British Columbia; Prairies; Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut; Ontario; Quebec; and Atlantic Canada. In addition, at least one Certificate of Excellence and one Certificate of Achievement are awarded to top-ranked Aboriginal educators.

Certificate of Excellence recipients may also be invited to participate in best practice sessions and to attend an awards presentation with the Prime Minister, or his designate, traditionally held in Ottawa. Certificate of Achievement recipients are honoured at local school or community events involving school principals or centre directors, peers, students, and local Members of Parliament or local leaders, as appropriate.

## Exemplary Practices

Promoting the exemplary practices of PMA recipients is a major focus of this program. We are committed to sharing the innovative ideas and creative approaches of the award winners with other national level recipients from across Canada. Award-winning early childhood educators participate in "**Teacher's Talk**"—a forum where they can convey their best practices and most memorable moments as educators. Reflecting the growing trend in Canada toward integration, recipients of both the PMA for Teaching Excellence and for Excellence in Early Childhood Education take part in the same forum. Read more on the [best practices](#) of some of Canada's most outstanding educators.

## Selection Committee

Considered Canada's top honour for early childhood educators, the PMA is not an easy award to win. Recipients are selected through a rigorous two-tier process involving expert reviewers which include [early childhood education and care practitioners and stakeholders](#) from across Canada. Nominees are evaluated based on how well they meet the [selection criteria](#) and judged on their overall and ongoing merits as educators.

## Contact Us

If you have any questions about the PMA program, please [contact the program office](#). If you would like to receive regular updates on the PMA program, we invite you to sign up to our [email distribution list](#).