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PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS

for Excellence in
Early Childhood Education

Exemplary Practices 2008



Canada

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INTRODUCTION — YOUR RESOURCE

Welcome to your Exemplary Practices resource for Early Childhood Education brought to you by the Prime Minister's Awards. Within these pages, you will be introduced to extraordinary early childhood educators from across the country that have been recognized by the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education for the remarkable work that they have been doing to improve the lives of our young children.

The content of the booklet is divided up into sections. These are:

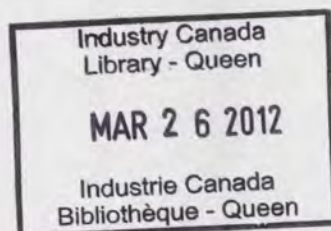
- *Biographies;*
- *Feature Articles; and*
- *Collective Wisdom*


The Exemplary Practices booklet is intended to be a tribute to the 2008 ECE winners but more than that, part of their legacy is designed to further what they have experienced by sharing their wealth of knowledge and experience with other ECE professionals across Canada.

The 2008 ECE winners focus on creativity in their classrooms. They allow children to express themselves in their own way, supporting their feelings of self-worth. At the same time, it is clear that the progress of each child is clearly documented so parents, the child and other educators have a record of what has been achieved. The PMA winners have created environments that permit risk-taking and where there is no judgment of right or wrong, good or bad. An environment and a culture that accommodates all children regardless of ability. The reward is seeing the growth, the progress and the burgeoning self-esteem of children as they express themselves creatively through play.

In addition to being outstanding educators, the ECE Excellence winners are active in their respective communities. They are involved in a vast range of volunteer events and programs. They also support their colleagues through advocating for improved professional standards and pay, helping to ensure that all children's needs are met, playing the role of mentor to existing and new staff and ECE students and strive to keep abreast of the latest trends and developments through professional development opportunities. They represent the complete package in ECE teaching and development.

The ideas and concepts articulated here form the essence of the exemplary practices introduced in this booklet and are further detailed on the PMA Web site: www.pma.gc.ca. Please regard this content as a personal resource that supports the high quality work being done in the field of early childhood education.





ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early 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 meet life's challenges. The awards are administered by Industry Canada on behalf of the Prime Minister and in partnership with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Health Canada.

The selection committee is comprised of early childhood education and care practitioners and stakeholders. Together, they evaluate applications based on clear evidence that nominees have excelled in the following four areas:

- *Support of child development;*
- *Innovation;*
- *Involvement with parents, families and the community; and*
- *Commitment and leadership in the field.*

To be eligible for an award, educators must work a minimum of 2.5 days a week providing direct education and care to young children in a licensed early childhood education setting (as defined by provincial or territorial government regulations). This requirement is waived for nominees who work in Aboriginal Head Start sites on and off reserve or in early childhood education settings on reserve in circumstances in which there is no applicable provincial or territorial government licensing.

Nominees may receive one of two awards: the Certificate of Excellence or the Certificate of Achievement. At least one of the Certificates of Excellence and Certificates of Achievement are awarded annually to Aboriginal early childhood educators. All recipients receive a certificate from the Prime Minister and a financial award that may be used for professional development, equipment, resource materials or other tools to improve developmental programming and children's experiences related to the educator's work.

Certificate of Excellence recipients travel to Ottawa where they participate in best practice sessions, and receive their award certificates at a special event. Certificate of Achievement recipients are honoured at local events involving children, supervisors, colleagues and local members of Parliament or local leaders, as appropriate.

For more information about the program, or to get a copy of the complete nomination guidelines, call (613) 946-0651 or send an e-mail to pmate-ppmee@gc.ca

All written correspondence should be addressed to:
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Industry Canada
20th Floor
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Ottawa ON K1A 0C8

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Meet the Prime Minister Award Winners for Excellence in Early Childhood Education
(Full biographies are posted on the PMA Web site: www.pma.gc.ca)

BRITISH COLUMBIA



KIM ATKINSON
Lansdowne Preschool
Victoria, BC
Preschool (Parent Participation)
for children ages 3 to 5



JENNIFER DURKIN
Kiddies Korner Preschool
Port Coquitlam, BC
Preschool for children ages 3 to 5



BRENDA REMPEL
Campbell River Christian
Life Daycare Society
Campbell River, BC
Childcare centre for children ages
30 months to 12 years



GLENDA TREFFRY-GOATLEY
Friendly Forest Parent
Cooperative Preschool
Anmore, BC
Preschool for children ages 3 to 5

ALBERTA



TERRI CALDER
Foothills Alliance Preschool
Calgary, AB
Preschool for children ages 3 and 4

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



CELESTE GOULET
Sister Celeste Child
Development Centre
Tulita, NT
Preschool for children
ages 3 to 5

MANITOBA



VIVIAN R. SCOTT
Cross Lake Early
Childhood Education Center
Cross Lake, MB
Daycare and Aboriginal Head
Start program for children ages
3 months to 6 years

ONTARIO



LORI KANTERS
Belvoir Co-operative
Nursery School
Delaware, ON
Nursery school for children
ages 18 months to 5 years

QUEBEC



GENEVIÈVE WHITTON
Centre de la petite enfance
Passe-Partout, inc.
Quebec City, Quebec
Early childhood centre for
children ages 4 and 5

NOVA SCOTIA



BOBBI-LYNN KEATING
Peter Green Hall
Children's Centre
Halifax, NS
Childcare centre for children
ages 3.5 to 5 years

FEATURE ARTICLES

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

When the PMA Winners for Excellence in Early Childhood Education were brought to Ottawa in May 2008, it wasn't only to be feted and receive their well-deserved awards, they were brought to work, to share information and complete hands-on tasks.

First, all recipients were asked to make a short presentation on an area of early childhood education that is special to them. The remaining feature articles are based on those presentations. Next, they participated in a visioning exercise in which they were asked to create the Early Childhood Centre for the 21st century.

Prior to their arrival, the recipients were asked, "How would you instill a love of learning in the 21st century?" Once in Ottawa they were part of a team to execute this visioning exercise and act on their ideas. What resulted was a realization of the synthesis of ideas expressed during the two-day workshop.

To start, each of the imagined ECE centres was given a name that was evocative of nature such as Garden Village and Forest Circle. Although there was no collusion among them, each of the schematic drawings and models was based on a circular model. The symbolism of the circle has a spiritual meaning and is also important to the Native community representing unity and life. The availability of natural light was deemed essential and this meant that the designs incorporated a lot of glass, large windows and sliding doors. The envisioned centres all made the outdoors easily if not instantly accessible.

The interiors featured a large 'piazza' where families and other groups would gather leading outside to a large play space. The interior space also featured a family support room for literacy purposes where parents could read quietly to their children, a health room and a spacious kitchen in the centre of the building with a large table for the adults and children. One kitchen also featured a stone pizza oven. On the second floor of these new establishments, visitors would find a bright and airy art studio, a spacious staff lounge and an efficient but executive-sized office where the administration manages the centre's operational needs. Spaces were set aside for music and drama and meeting areas.

A common outdoor theme was the fruit and vegetable patch where children would grow, nurture and harvest organic products and cook them in the kitchen. Outside were woodlands, bike trails and a shallow pond plus a more conventional play space with playground equipment.

Much of the thinking focused on community. One design, in particular, envisioned a series of pods connected to the ECE centre much like an extended village. These pods included an elementary and high school, a fruit and vegetable market (supplied in part by the garden outside), a bakery, a woodwork shop and an Elder centre.

The commonalities in the proposed designs included the use of natural materials where possible, exposure to natural light, easy access to the outdoors and a warm, welcoming environment that accommodated a wide range of needs and interests. Central to all of this, however, was designing a space that nurtured the creativity of children in their care.



REGGIO EMILIA—UNLEASHING THE CHILD'S CREATIVITY

When Bobbi-Lynn Keating arrived at the Peter Green Hall Children's Centre in Halifax fourteen years ago, she felt as if she had come home. The Director of the Centre, Barb Bigelow introduced her to the Reggio Emilia approach to Early Childhood learning. "It felt like a warm blanket," she says. "This was the approach I had been searching for."

So who was Reggio Emilia?

For those who don't know, the real surprise is that Reggio Emilia is a what, not a who. That is, a small town in the Tuscany region of Italy that found itself in a dilemma after the Second World War when all of its institutions, including the schools, were destroyed. The parents of the town needed to find a way to educate their children and do so expediently. The focus to this educational regimen is pre-school and primary.

The thinking is this: if learning is of interest to the child, it will be meaningful. Structuring this form of learning from a child's perspective also gives them some measure of control over their learning. This also means that the approach to learning as espoused by Reggio Emilia is continually evolving. There is no set

curriculum. There are no finite learning outcomes. It is a holistic, organic approach to learning that allows children to express their creativity in the most fundamental and often sloppy and messy way.

For example, in Bobbi-Lynn Keating's class at Peter Green Hall, the children discovered an interest in crocodiles when some toy crocodiles were bought by a student teacher at a dollar store. The kids slept with the crocodiles, took them to lunch, to the playground and some took them home. In the library, there are encyclopedias so they looked up information on crocodiles. Children were given sketch books so they could draw crocodiles. They found out where crocodiles live, how big they grow and that crocodiles lay up to 80 eggs. The group went to the kitchen and asked the cook for 80 eggs, made a nest and filled it up discovering it was a lot of eggs. Crocodiles were then made or represented out of art materials like wire and string. Finally, the class created a display that documented the educational journey they took to discover crocodiles. The documentation consisted of text and pictures showing the transition from one stage of the project to the other. The display was posted on the wall for all to see. There was no fixed time for the crocodile project to be completed and no set direction in which it could go. The project was dependent on the interests of the children and what they wanted to explore.

What we see in this approach is the development of a sophisticated skill set. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate and problem-solve. It is a project involving teamwork, decision-making and requires the use of physical materials. Reggio Emilia is very keen on documentation and these displays, such as the Crocodile project, form part of the body of work children undertake in a given year.

Over the past 14 years, Bobbi-Lynn Keating has learned the language of Reggio Emilia. She says: "I facilitate a program that embraces the children's interests, creating a learning environment that children interact with, keeping the learning relative and meaningful. When children are allowed to explore and research the things that are meaningful to them, it creates a lifelong foundation."

**"When children
are allowed to
explore and research
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long foundation."**

Bobbi-Lynn Keating



FOSTERING AND NURTURING ABORIGINAL CULTURE

Cross Lake is the name of two closely related, adjoining but independent communities in Manitoba. One of the Cross Lakes is the Cross Lake Indian Reserve while the other is on nearby provincial Crown land. The communities are located about 520 kilometres by air north of Winnipeg, and 120 kilometres by air south of Thompson. Vivian Scott is the Director of the Cross Lake Early Childhood Education Centre. Vivian Scott believes, "all children are unique individuals and that we need to respect each child. We provide a safe, caring and friendly environment for all children. We allow each child to grow at their pace when they are ready to take the next step in the program. We realize the importance of teaching our culture and language to the children."

The characteristics of the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs are:

- *Community-based;*
- *Programming in the six program*

component areas:

Culture and Language

Education and School Readiness

Health Promotion

Nutrition

Social Support

Parental and Family Involvement

The culture and language component provides children with a positive sense of themselves as Aboriginal children and building on their knowledge of their Aboriginal languages and experience of culture in their communities.

The program also focuses on school readiness by delivering a well-rounded approach that supports and encourages each Aboriginal child to enjoy life-long learning by encouraging each child to take initiative in learning and providing them with enjoyable opportunities to learn.

Social support ensures that the families are made aware of resources and community services available to impact their quality of life. Health promotion supports the empowerment of parents, guardians, caregivers and those involved with AHS to increase control over and improve their overall health and well-being.

The nutrition component ensures that children are provided with nutritious hot meals and snacks that will help meet their nutritional needs. It also serves to educate staff and parents about the relationship of nutrition to children's ability to learn, physical development and mental development.

Parents are actively involved in the planning, development and implementation of the program. The programming is unique within each community in the manner in which they help parents improve parenting skills, support family relationships and contribute to each child's healthy development. The parental involvement component supports the parents and family role as their child's primary teacher. The parents/family involvement may occur through various activities and contributions in the program. Parental involvement provides an opportunity to empower parents to share their talents and further develop as role models for their child and in their community.

Vivian sums up the importance of her program and those similar as follows: "We have the opportunity to be the first teachers in the life of the young ones and we know how important a job it is to fill. All people need to realize that allowing each child the opportunity to enter the early childhood programs means they will have a great start to their life."

"We realize the importance of teaching our culture and language to the children."

Vivian Scott



CHILDCARE IN THE FAR NORTH

It isn't every childcare centre that teaches young children how to snare a rabbit. Not only how to snare the rabbit, but skin it, cook it and eat it in a communal meal shared with the Elders of the community.

**"Although
we guide,
our teachers
try to let
the children
discover."**

Sister Celeste Goulet

But when a childcare centre is nestled in the far north, in Tulita, Northwest Territories as is the Sister Celeste Child Development Centre administered by Sister Celeste Goulet, this is an important part of the experience children are given. Tulita, meaning "where the rivers-waters meet", is a hamlet in the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories. It is located at the junction of the Great Bear River and the Mackenzie River. Even though the world is rapidly transforming around them and this is as true in the far north as it is anywhere, "We help each child adapt to a changing world while keeping their identity," says Sister Celeste. "We teach children how to learn rather than what to learn and encourage a democratic process that includes all members of the community. Each child has a voice and as part of the community, we help them respect the differences of others."

Sister Celeste, who is not Aboriginal, has lived and worked in Tulita for the past 29 years. She has become part of the rich fabric of the community. One outcome of her time in Tulita has been the creation of 15 picture books about the legends, stories and the Elders traditional way of life in the community. The books are being used in the region's preschool and elementary school cultural language classes that focus on the indigenous Slavey language. The books fit with her philosophy of teaching children to "love themselves" and in doing so, will begin to love learning. "I try to let each child take the lead in learning development. Although we guide, our teachers try to let the children discover."

COOKING AT PRE-SCHOOL

"Cooking involves adult learning and it promotes socialization, a feeling of pride and accomplishment. It also relates to pre-math, pre-science and reading," says Terri Calder of Foothills Alliance Pre-school in Calgary of her cooking program.



Cooking is fun, nutritious and educational. All of the ingredients are pre-measured and the containers are numbered so children can read the numbers and follow the right sequence for the recipe. To make it easier to follow along, Calder creates a picture recipe with simple instructions that encourages literacy and math through measuring out the ingredients. She found all of the images easily on the Internet using Google Image. They go through each recipe together first as a group then each table group does it on their own. The children take responsibility for making the recipe themselves.

Safety is carefully monitored to ensure all recipes are safe for children with food allergies. She checks all the ingredients with parents of these children beforehand. Utensils like plastic knives with serrated edges are used to "cut food not fingers". Scissors are used for cutting some ingredients such as celery. It develops fine motor skills as well as working faster. "One snip and it's done", Calder says.

Cooking together also promotes cultural understanding and community involvement. "We have a high percentage of Oriental children so we try to incorporate culture into

cooking,” Calder says. On the Chinese New Year, they cooked fried rice, and some of the grandmothers came in with dumplings and spring rolls. They ate using chopsticks. The children also wear traditional costumes during theme days.

Calder recommends starting with simple recipes like making trail mix (ensuring it is nut-free) and scrambled eggs before trying more complicated foods. It’s important that all kids have the chance to participate. “They all get to dump something in,” she says.

LEAVING NO ONE OUT

“Inclusion is my passion,” says Brenda Rempel of Campbell River Christian Life Daycare, Campbell River, BC. This passion came out of the experience when her daughter, Jolene, was born in 1981 with an incurable brain condition. She died at age four and a half. “I was taught patience by my daughter, taught problem-solving and to accept differences,” she says. “My daughter had the brain of a newborn so the traditional way to communicate wasn’t there but still, there was a strong connection.”

To illustrate, two children in her daycare use sign language. Says Rempel: “I thought about what good it was that only two could sign but not the others, so with the help of a speech and language pathologist and staff, we taught all the children to sign.” All children know up to 20 signs so now everyone communicates.



The daycare is also piloting the Seeds of Empathy program (www.seedsofempathy.org) where a young baby is brought into the classroom by its mother every three weeks. The children have the opportunity to observe the baby for 30 minutes each time. “They learn about attachments, understand milestones, temperament and ask questions,” says Rempel. “The program teaches them about development.” For example, children ask if the baby is walking yet and if it isn’t, it’s okay to learn that it hasn’t happened yet and that some things take time and don’t happen right away.

“Inclusion isn’t just about children with disabilities,” says Rempel. “But it involves looking at learning styles. We team with parents and build a strategy together.” For autistic children in the daycare, there are intervention programs. They work with speech and language pathologists as well as other community professionals who come into the centre. Team meetings are planned with the families of autistic children to set goals.

Within the daycare are nine different environments. “Each environment is tailored to the needs of the classroom,” Rempel says. “We are meeting their needs so children can be successful.” In other words, ensuring that no child is excluded and that all have the opportunity to succeed.

IMAGINATION – CREATING ALMOST ANYTHING FROM ALMOST NOTHING

One day, a little boy in Geneviève Whittom’s group decided to see what would happen if he stomped on a tube of toothpaste – and we all know what happened next! Instead of getting upset, the teacher used the opportunity to organize an impromptu art session, thus allowing the children to use their imagination. “A little imagination is all you need to transform anything,” Ms. Whittom explains. “The children have fun and learn not to waste things.”

Ms. Whittom is an educator at the Centre de la petite enfance (CPE) Passe-Partout inc. in Quebec City. The CPE is located in a working-class neighbourhood, where many parents do not have the resources to provide their children with toys and outings.

This educator knows that even the simplest project can teach little ones a great deal. This is what happened when the children in one of her groups became fascinated by the letter carrier's daily visit. They wanted to know where he went after he delivered the mail to the CPE, and where the letters came from. Ms. Whittom had her next project. She helped the children write a letter to their friends at another CPE.



Another device Ms. Whittom has used to fuel the children's imagination is her invention of Clémentine. Poor Clémentine has no home; she has to live in airplanes. Everywhere she goes, she sends postcards to the CPE, each one depicting a land more marvellous than the one before. The postcards provide a springboard for lively discussions and activities – for example, inspired by a card showing the Great Wall of China, the children built their own wall. “China alone is a theme that could have kept the children busy for an entire year,” Ms. Whittom said.

There are other characters in the imaginary world Ms. Whittom has created. The children learn to cook with a kindly chef and make discoveries with a charming professor. The professor makes them wear special glasses, which turn them into real scientists. It doesn't matter that the glasses are just dime-store toys; to the children they are magical objects, because they are used only for their activities with this amusing professor.

Ms. Whittom also knows how to use imagination to stimulate the children's social development. She uses a marionette to help encourage group interaction, and get the youngsters to think about their emotions and the impact they may have on the people around them. Inspired by a record album, there is also a tear fairy who collects the children's tears in buckets, one for each emotion that has made them flow: sadness, anger, pain. There is even a bucket for crocodile tears! This also helps the children gain awareness of what they are feeling.

In addition to these teaching tools, Ms. Whittom conducts an activity that teaches the children how to recognize and resolve their disputes. They learn to calm down, explain what is bothering them and find a mutually satisfactory solution to the problem.

“My group is called the Shooting Stars,” Ms. Whittom explains. “Seeing a shooting star is an unforgettable experience. The moment is fleeting, but magical. I try to make sure that the year spent together leaves them with the same impression.”

SENSORY STIMULATION

It was at a conference on brain development that Glenda Treffry-Goatley of Friendly Forest Parent Co-operative Preschool in Anmore, BC, found her inspiration. She approached one presenter and asked which teaching approach best supported the brain development of young children. The presenter responded: “Just listen to the child—listen, respond, nurture—and then provide the experiences.” The light went on.

At her preschool, children have ample opportunity for multi-sensory play. There is sand, water, loads of clay, paint, play dough, glue and glitter among other materials. Summing

up her philosophy of teaching, Treffry-Goatley says, "I concentrate on being in the moment with the child. I am inspired each day by the children who play around me. I am in awe at how they play with the materials, experiment with concepts and negotiate their way through interactions." Like the little boy who came to the centre one day and asked to bake cookies. He requested two forks...and then some cookie dough. He spent his playtime carefully rolling the dough and pressed them flat with criss-cross fork marks. He rolled out 22 cookies, enough for everyone in the class. After they were baked, the children sat outside in the rain eating the little boy's cookies.

The outside world is brought indoors for study. There are two large fish tanks, aquariums with snails, worms, crickets, tadpoles and butterfly baskets. Plants, flowers, fruit, shells, rocks, stones, sticks and pinecones fill baskets on the shelves. Plastic toys are being replaced with those made from natural materials such as wood, metal, wool or cotton.

Each day begins with indoor play and ends with outdoor play. Outside is a large, natural play space with a large sand area, trees, bushes and wood enclosures. Recently, children and parents built a stick house with posts and sticks. The children will add to the house as they think up ideas for it. The children experience all kinds of weather in order to understand it. They lie in the snow, get wet in the rain and find cool shade when it is very hot. When it is raining, everyone at the centre is happy. They know it is time to go out and play.

COOPERATIVE PRESCHOOLS

Lori Kanters of the Belvoir Co-operative Nursery School in Delaware, Ontario, believes that cooperative pre-schools attract a special kind of family. "Parents who choose co-op are seeking a positive first learning experience for their young children," she says. A lot of commitment and juggling is evident on the part of the parents as they work part-time, are stay-at-home, on maternity/paternity leave or try to balance demanding careers while devoting time to the co-op experience.

A parent participation, or cooperative, nursery school is a nonprofit, non-sectarian, democratic organization where each family shares in the planning and operation of the school. Parents participate in the program on a rotating basis, serving as assistants to a professional nursery school teacher and staff. The efforts of parents and their direct involvement during the school day make parent participation nursery schools a unique educational endeavor. (<http://www.meadowest.com/history.htm>)

In 1915, faculty wives at the University of Chicago started the first parent participation nursery school. They wanted to provide a social experience for their children and parent education for themselves. The first parent participation nursery school in California was organized in 1929 in Berkeley and is still in operation today.

All of the unpaid work is valued and recognized. Kanters sends out thank-you notes and acknowledges them in the monthly newsletter. Her former preschool created a Volunteer of the Year award where the nominees were put forward by parents and professional educators in recognition of their efforts.

Kanters appreciates the time she spends with parent volunteers and develops a deeper understanding of their children. "Mutual respect between the parents and teachers is of the utmost importance," she says. "Teachers are the pre-school experts, while parents are the resident experts."

"Teachers are the pre-school experts, while parents are the resident experts."

Lori Kanters



BRINGING STORIES TO LIFE

Kim Atkinson walks around the Lansdowne Preschool in Victoria, BC with a clipboard, pen and paper so children can dictate stories to her. The storywriting is a daily part of the routine, but the impetus for more extensive documentation came from her participation in a research project out of the University of Victoria, the faculty of Child and Youth Care called 'Investigating Quality'. The purpose of the project is to re-examine and re-think Early Childhood Education. With the goal of making learning visible and being more reflective in her practice, Kim decided to extend the storywriting project.

Kim explored the theme of princesses with the group based on a story made up by four, four-year old girls: "One day, there was an evil stepmother and there was a cottage and there were four princesses and there was a castle. They went to their cabinet where they had a treasure and then the evil stepmother tied up the four princesses. They escaped deep into the forest but then the evil stepmother 'go-ed' in her van to get the princesses out of the forest. All of the princesses walked home and went in the princesses' car and drove to

the mall. Then the princesses went shopping. After they went shopping, they 'caught up' to the evil stepmother and got her out of the van and threw her in the garbage. The evil stepmother got out of the garbage, pulled the four princesses and took them to their house and tied them up. They got untied and danced with the prince and then after the ball, they threw the evil stepmother in the garbage again and lived happily ever after."

Thinking there was more to the notion of princesses, Kim suggested the four girls make puppets and act out the story. As the girls were engaged in this playmaking, the boys in the

group decided the story needed some pirates. The boys joined in the playmaking adding pirate parts. The activity evolved with more facets such as boats and treasure being added. Kim and the children discussed such concepts as good and evil, and gender with most of the children convinced that pirates are almost always boys not girls.

The children created a pirate anthem that had to be sung at the beginning of the play. They discussed the idea of treasure and what it meant and who should get it. She asked the children to draw pictures of themselves as princesses and pirates and was amazed at the attention to detail that went into the drawings. The group discussed whether pirates were good or bad, whether princesses would fight if they had swords, if pirates wore jewelry like princesses, what the treasure was composed of and what the pirates and princesses would actually do with the treasure. "This has been a fascinating process," says Atkinson. "The documentation has enabled me to look more carefully at the children's thinking, and I shared that information with the parents." The project raised complex questions about the power of the theme of pirates and princesses, gender and role-playing.

She wondered if the medium of the play was an opportunity for the children to take on a role that is commonly understood by them, try it, explore it, absorb the reactions and dialogue derived from it, test it out. "Kids try on identities, and try to make meaning of their world by exploring through their play and their dramatic narratives," she says. "The children have shown me creativity, sensitivity, humour, courage, immense



"The children have shown me creativity, sensitivity, humour, courage, immense cooperation and a spirit of willingness to work together, diligence to pursue a project for months, and a feistiness to be heard. I am, as usual, humbled by them."

RISK-TAKING THROUGH PLAY

There is no formal teaching at Kiddies Korner Preschool in Port Coquitlam, BC, says Jennifer Durkin who has nearly 40 years experience in the ECE field. "My belief is, that if I can help children develop socially and emotionally, all the academics will come in due course," she says. "Children need to be allowed to risk in many areas of their life and each time they succeed, their self-worth strengthens and they feel ready to try new things."

The type of risk in which children are engaged takes many forms. For some, putting pen to paper involves risk but with encouragement, children learn how to succeed. For others it is shooting down the slide on their stomachs, head first. Although the slide doesn't appear high to an adult, it can be intimidating for a three-year old. Once done, a feeling of accomplishment ensues.

Durkin bristles at the preponderance of rules in other centres she's visited. "I see that as not trusting children to problem-solve. We adults have to work it out and with encouragement, children can work it out as well."

She goes on to cite relevant research where children who are not comfortable taking risks often end up as hesitant readers, are slower to learn math skills and lack creativity. Kids who turn easel painting into finger painting, or 'fly' cars up in the air before landing them, use felt pens to make a tower or create their own ending for a story, are being creative. Durkin thinks there are no wrong answers just different ones. She also believes those children who are creative in their thinking may be the ones to make a real difference in the world. "One of them may find a way to stop world hunger or cure cancer," she says. "I would be so proud to say that I once taught them if they hurry and get it done so that I'm still around."



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Jennifer Durkin

COLLECTIVE WISDOM

Prior to attending the workshop in Ottawa, each of the PMA Excellence winners completed a comprehensive questionnaire providing answers to questions that explored their personal and professional qualities, attitudes and experiences. During their visit to Ottawa they shared experiences and passed on their insights and hard-earned knowledge during the two-day workshop. The following are excerpts taken from the questionnaires.

Here are the questions the PMA Excellence winners answered.
The answers are direct quotes:

Describe Yourself in a Single Sentence



The following observations are typical of how ECE PMA winners see themselves:

"I am outgoing and nurturing while having a strong belief in the importance of quality education for our young children."
—*Jennifer Durkin*

"What ever I do, I do my best." —*Brenda Rempel*

"I strive to be loyal, empathetic, dedicated and kind." —*Terri Calder*

How Do You Instill a Love of Learning in Children?

"Three and four year olds have an instinctive love of learning, I don't have to instill it! I need to provide many opportunities for exploration, provocative materials that spark curiosity, and a safe environment where children can take risks." —*Kim Atkinson*

"We believe all children are unique individuals and that we need to respect each child. We provide a safe, caring and friendly environment for all children. We allow each child to grow at their pace when they are ready to take the next step in the program. We realize the importance of teaching our language and culture to the children. By loving all children for who they are. To play and have fun." —*Vivian Scott*

"Most important is relationships and attachments. I believe a child must feel safe and secure before they will be ready to explore and learn. By taking children's knowledge, adding to their information, always moving them forward and believing in their individual abilities provides a desire to learn more. Learning must be fun with many opportunities to create a desire to explore and expand a child's world." —*Brenda Rempel*

What Practices Do Teachers and ECE Share?

During the two-day workshop in Ottawa, the PMA Teaching Excellence winners and the ECE winners were brought together to share and discuss common values and ideas and to acknowledge the importance of the role they each fulfill. Given that education is a continuum, it is also important to share information from each end of the educational

spectrum. In the companion booklet that describes the exemplary practices of the PMA Award Winners for Teaching Excellence, ECE practitioners similarly communicate the importance of teaching from their own perspective. Following are expressions of how teachers perceive the role of ECE within the education system. When asked to comment, teachers said of their ECE counterparts:

“How vital their role is in helping to prepare students for school. Teaching is most effective when it mirrors early childhood education. Hands on constructivist learning, modelling, discussion and free play are all integral to learning at any age.”

—*Milissa Gavel, Teacher/Principal, Grade 6 Homeroom, K-6 Technology, 2008 PMA Award Winner for Teaching Excellence*

“Most of the qualities that make an effective ECE will transfer over to teaching.”

—*John Harris, Teacher, Grade 2-9 Science, Social Studies, Technology, Music, 2008 PMA Award Winner for Teaching Excellence*

“Grade 12 students still like to receive stickers.”

—*Cheryl Carr, Teacher, Grade 9-12 Geography, 2008 PMA Award Winner for Teaching Excellence*

“We all have the same goal. We all want to facilitate the children we teach in becoming global citizens and lifelong learners.”

—*Devon Ross, Teacher, Science 9, Chemistry 12, Geology 12, 2008 PMA Award Winner for Teaching Excellence*

“You are probably the most important step in the teaching process.”

—*Melanie Gertley, Grade 10-12, Science, Chemistry Biology, 2008 PMA Award Winner for Teaching Excellence*

How Can We Meet the Needs of 21st Century Teaching and Learning?

“We need to recognize that children are complex and unique individuals. Our job is to create an environment that is safe, relevant, and meaningful. We need to collaborate with the children to create places and projects that reflect their interest, their lives, their curiosity. We need to allow for many styles of creativity, many intelligences, many ways of being. Children learn when they are engaged, when they feel curious. They do not learn when they are bored, when the learning is repetitive and rote. My job is to engage every child.”—**Kim Atkinson**

“Higher staff to child ratio to meet the learning style of the individual child. Children should be educated in thoughtfully designed environments.”—**Glenda Treffry-Goatley**

“Children are expected to know more and more at younger ages - reading early in Kindergarten. The challenge for Early Childhood Educators is to ensure children have the necessary academic skills they will require for Kindergarten without sacrificing play, imagination, self-discovery and fun!! For an ECE teacher - creativity is essential.”

—**Terri Calder**



“We need to recognize that children are complex and unique individuals.”

Kim Atkinson

Top Ten Helpful Tips From PMA Winners

Check out the full list of top tips at
www.pma.gc.ca — www.ppm.gc.ca

1. Have fun (if the activities you plan interest and excite you - your enthusiasm will be infectious).
2. Be flexible (the direction of a lesson can change with one comment or question from a student).
3. Seek out colleagues (in this profession we often teach in isolation - we need to tap into the wisdom of others).
4. Teach the same lesson to a number of different classes (repetition of a lesson leads to fine tuning and perfecting of ideas/implementation).
5. Involve parents (The link between home and school is very important and must be fostered. Apart from showing children they value them and school activities, parent volunteers provide necessary support to classroom teachers.).
6. Familiarize yourself with community resources (speech therapists, parenting resources, etc. Parents often ask for assistance with behavioural and developmental concerns. Having references on hand is always helpful.).
7. Tour other Preschools - a lot can be learned through observation.
8. Display children's work as much as possible (parents love seeing it and children feel of sense of pride knowing you value their efforts).
9. Make yourself accessible (use email - a quick way to contact all parents keeping them apprised of classroom activities - also saves paper!! Parents have my email address so they can contact me directly with any concerns and questions.).
10. Play!!

Tools and Resources as Suggested by ECE Winners

"A good play dough recipe. I think play dough should be mandatory for all schools and boardrooms, a blob at every desk! A little tactile sensory stimulation is good for the soul, good for the creative spirit, smoothes the rough edges of the day.....for all ages."

—*Kim Atkinson*

<http://www.pedagonet.com/quickies/playdough.htm>

Sample Recipe

2 cups flour
1 cup salt
2 tablespoons cream of tarter
2 cups of water
1 tablespoons mineral oil
food coloring
Mix all ingredients in a saucepan.
Cook over medium heat, stirring until stiff.
Allow to cool, then knead.



"I could not survive without the "BoardMaker" program and a camera. "Seeds of Empathy", an awesome tool--curriculum to teach children about empathy and early literacy. Your local supported child development. Your local resources such as speech and language Occupational Therapists, Psychology professionals. Resource and referral programs offering workshops. Private Speech and Language Pathologists. The Internet and the wealth of information that is made available to the ECE world."—**Brenda Rempel**

"The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education."—**Bobbi-Lynn Keating**

Mentoring Others—How would the ECE winners guide new teachers? What advice would they give?

"Look at the positive in a child. Don't be afraid of their behaviours because all of them are means of communication, some just communicate more intensely. Listen to children, they will teach you what you need to know."—**Brenda Rempel**

"I would remind them that working with children is most important since they are our future. It is hard work but unbelievably fulfilling. I would tell them that there are no bad children, just bad behavior. I would show them that each child is unique and to be valued for their individuality. I would show them how much I love the work that I do and encourage them to make a difference in the lives of the children they come in contact with."—**Jennifer Durkin**

"I would share all the things that have worked for me over the years - themes children loved, activities that were fun, educational and well-received. I would tell them to constantly self-evaluate. At the end of the day, record what happened, what would you change, what would you do the same, etc. These notes are always valuable in future planning. I would tell them that dedication to professional development is rewarding and appreciated by students and parents alike."—**Terri Calder**

Choosing One Special Area of Interest and How It Is Approached

The ECE winners chose one important topic that reflects on the work they do in their classrooms. The choices included Child Development, Innovation, Family/Community Involvement, Commitment and Leadership.

"**Community Leadership.** I conduct workshops for parents on a variety of topics directly related to issues parents have expressed concern or interest in, such as emergent literacy and conflict resolution. I write monthly articles on parenting issues such as sensory integration, taking risks, and preschool communication in our school newsletter, and I write articles for a local parenting magazine. I also mentor new ECE's and students."—**Kim Atkinson**

"**Child development.** Every month we post a newsletter for parents covering an aspect of child development. (We provide) Photo Documentation in the classroom and a newsletter regarding the children's activities and learning. Informal discussions with parents at the end of the day. Monthly parent meetings and topics for discussion."—**Glenda Treffry-Goatley**

**"I would remind
them that working
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Jennifer Durkin

Family Involvement - "I work closely with parents in the preschool. I feel that by modelling the appropriate language and guidance techniques, the parents will learn that these work. Parents are an integral part of Kiddies Korner preschool and I try to encourage them to enjoy their times at the preschool with their children. It is a privilege to work so closely with each of them."—*Jennifer Durkin*

Family Involvement - "Parents are a child's first teacher, and it is essential that they take an active role in their child's education. Families at my school are encouraged to be involved in their child's education as much as possible. To assist with this endeavour, parents are scheduled to volunteer in their child's class once every month. Communication lines are open - parents are encouraged to contact me directly with comments, concerns, suggestions, questions. Information pages are posted around the room outlining the learning that occurs at each play center (i.e. At the sand table we are developing sensory awareness and mathematical skills such as measuring and estimating.) Parents are provided with newsletters that outline classroom events, but also provide parenting suggestions (i.e. how to foster math skills in the home, how to help your child sit through a fancy family dinner at Thanksgiving, etc.)."—*Terri Calder*



The Prime Minister's Awards recipients at the awards presentation ceremony in Ottawa. May 2008