



The Early Childhood Educators of BC

Leadership Initiative

In partnership with Vancity Community Foundation

September 2008

BACKGROUND

The Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) is happy to announce that our new and evolving Leadership Initiative is off and running.

Our work on the Leadership Initiative began in 2007 when we entered into a partnership with Vancity Community Foundation. With funds the Foundation received from BC's Ministry of Children and Family Development, we agreed to work with VanCity to develop two programs:

- The ECE Student Bursary Program which is in progress (information available on the ECEBC site)
- A Professional Development Program, which is under development and will be launched in Fall 2008.

The professional development program provides \$2 million to be used over a period of 3-5 years and is dedicated to providing professional development opportunities to ECEBC members and the Early Childhood field throughout the province. The Board of Directors of ECEBC has made the decision to use the funds to build capacity through professional leadership within the early childhood community. The program is being called the **ECEBC Leadership Initiative**.

In July 2007, a strategic planning session was held with participants invited from across BC. The purpose was to identify criteria and priorities for how best to use these funds in the interest of the ECE professional community. Many ideas were generated during a rich and productive interchange on topics of local and overall interest.

The key issues that arose translated into concern for our professional identity and the need to enhance the valuing of early childhood educators by the greater community.

Historically we have been less visible and less valued than teachers of older children. There is also the lingering view that those who both care for and educate young children all day count less than those who work in part-day programs.

The group concluded that it was time to examine professional leadership in the field from an individual and societal perspective with the goal of changing the image of ECEs in the community and connecting caring and early learning as essential parts of our work with young children. Participants indicated that progress on these goals would be achieved when ECEs have a strong and ready way to describe the work and value of our field and can proudly respond to the question "What do you do"?

BACKGROUND cont.

From this day's work and from a review of leadership models in other countries (New Zealand, the U.S. the United Kingdom) as well as projects in BC funded by the provincial Ministry of Education (The Early Learning Framework and The Investigating Quality Project), the following purpose emerged:

“ECEBC envisions an early childhood profession that believes strong and powerful early childhood leadership will influence recognition and respect by society at large and the communities we serve: the early childhood educator as a key agent of quality”.

This is reflected in the current ECEBC motto:

“I am an ECE educator. My work positively influences and impacts children’s development. I deserve to be valued for what I do.”

The current ECEBC \$20 an hour campaign is also clearly linked with these statements of purpose.

GOALS

Based on work done during the July 2007 strategic planning session a series of **Goals**, **Objectives** and **Initiatives** were generated.

Goals:

- Increase awareness of the social, emotional and economic impacts of early childhood education in BC communities.
- Deliver innovative, culturally sensitive, multi-facetted, holistic, interactive and knowledge-based approaches to networking and empowering participants in the early learning sector, with a view to influencing all levels of government.
- Build models of leadership that encourage empowerment, understanding and that strengthen the role of early childhood educators as individuals, within their branch and provincially.
- Enhance professional identity of early childhood educators in BC with a view to increased recruitment and retention.
- Identify key challenges facing Early Childhood Educators and develop solutions locally with a view to influencing provincial and federal policy.
- Tailor leadership provision to individual and local contexts and capitalize on the experience of those most likely to produce the best ideas within the early childhood sector: those who work in the sector.

OBJECTIVES

In order to meet these goals the following objectives were articulated.

Objectives:

- To increase public awareness of the critical role that early childhood leaders play in the provision of quality services (early learning and caring) for children and families through public education plans and resources.
- To establish Communities of Innovation in 10 different geographic locations throughout BC including but not limited to Aboriginal, Rural, Isolated, Urban, and culturally diverse communities.
- To build leadership capacity at the ECEBC board, branch and membership levels.
- To gain insight from and make linkages with other leadership programs and initiatives including the Early Learning Framework and the Investigating Quality initiatives already underway in BC.

ECEBC is committed to searching for a model of leadership that is consistent with the “ECE Way” – collaborative, non-hierarchical and action-oriented; where leadership does not focus on one individual but where all of us are potential leaders; where leaders can act from where they are, prepared to dialogue with others in the field, and confident in the values of the field, in our contribution to the world and in our ability to change it.

INITIATIVES

In order to achieve these objectives and after further communication with the participants from the initial gathering as well as other partners and interested individuals, the following two initiatives were approved by the Board of ECEBC. Funding for the two initiatives, including the cost of replacing ECE's on the floor, will be provided.

Initiatives

1. Develop and Deliver a Professional Leadership Institute

The aim of a Professional Leadership Institute is to help participants become cognisant of the current issues in the field and develop leadership capacity to address these issues. Working with participants to co-construct an ECE culture of leadership that is consistent with the values and culture of the field is central to this Initiative.

This is a time of change and of reconceptualizing ECE in its practice, and in how early childhood education will be delivered. In B.C. there have been new initiatives such as Strong Start programs, and using school spaces for ECE programs. Currently the Ministry of Education is considering initiating early childhood programs for children as early as age three. Will that move child care to the Ministry of Education? Will all day child care be funded? Will early learning and care be seen as a seamless whole? What is happening in other jurisdictions internationally and in Canada around these issues (e.g. New Brunswick and Ontario)? The language itself is also changing. The term "early learning" appears now in many documents – do we all have the same sense of this and other terms? An opportunity to provide information and to apply critical thinking to these issues is key.

The Institute will provide the opportunity to come together with others from 10 different geographic regions within BC.(see Communities of Innovation below) The purpose will be to explore, discuss and develop ways to provide common ground upon which to move forward professionally in our local settings, while maintaining contact with all the diverse geographical and cultural communities in B.C.

The format of this piece: a 4-5 day symposium held in the lower Mainland in January 2009 with 30 or so participants, 2-3 from each of 10 geographic regions to be identified.

INITIATIVES **cont.**

Possible Areas for Exploration at the initial symposium include

- Personal confidence and conviction building, including assertiveness training, conflict resolution, and public speaking
- Policy, legislation frameworks
- The value of childhood (international perspectives)
- Gendered perceptions of the field (how women are viewed in child care)
- The economic impact of child care
- Defining professional identity
- Addressing invisibility of the work
- Advocacy (plans and tools)
- Marketing and communications
- Understanding the process of mentoring
- Research (e.g. community-based research)
- Recording stories etc.

2. Develop and Support Communities of Innovation

The aim of the second and related initiative – Communities of Innovation – is to actively support the development of 10-12 community led leadership projects across BC. Projects will likely be as diverse as the communities from which they come but will all share a commitment to develop or build on established effective approaches and innovative practices to achieve the overall goals of the Leadership Initiative.

Diverse geographic and cultural communities will be invited to submit proposals about how, with support, they plan to raise public awareness about and respect for the work of ECEs. Once identified, small teams from the Communities of Innovation, will participate in the Leadership Institute where they will have an opportunity to develop their project plans and enhance their individual and collective leadership capacity.

INITIATIVES cont.

Possible Community of Innovation Projects could build on approaches that include:

- Sharing knowledge, understanding and models of leadership with others in the ECE sector including parents and partner organizations.
- Supporting participants to become strong advocates for young children and families.
- Supporting centres/organizations with established philosophy, policy and practices that embrace quality and leadership to take leadership roles in their communities.
- Supporting centres/organizations with established relationships with community organizations and the local school board to take leadership roles in their communities.
- Participatory action research in partnership with a skilled research associate to show the impact that innovative approaches and practice have on building leadership in communities.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Projected Implementation Plan

Year 1

- Fall 2008
 - Develop Leadership Initiative Steering Committee
 - Develop and distribute information about the Initiative
 - Establish and implement a process for identifying Communities of Innovation
 - Develop materials and delivery approaches for Institute

- Jan 2009 - Leadership Institute .
Four to five days, 30 participants (2-3 from each of the identified communities) held in Lower Mainland.
 - The Institute will begin the process of co-constructing a culture of ECE leadership, developing and enhancing leadership capacity and supporting individual communities to define and develop their own framework and plan for innovation. The Institute will also consider effective approaches for on-going support to Communities of Innovation.
 - Participants from each community will take their frameworks home with a plan to begin work in the community – e.g. raising community awareness, mentoring, using documentation, etc.

- May 2009- ECEBC Conference Track
 - The Track will provide an opportunity for community leaders to share their community experiences and initiatives

- Summer 2009
 - Institute at the University of Victoria to ‘share community stories’. There is also the possibility that participants in the Institute would be offered the opportunity to participate in 2 of the CYC Early Years modules connected with Institute themes- Leadership, Advocacy, and Policy, and Community Capacity Building. They would participate on-line, and complete the program at the Summer Institute.
 - Explore other possible post-secondary credit opportunities

- On-going
 - Based on participants’ needs, provide telephone, on-line support and networking opportunities for Communities of Innovation
 - Ensure fact-to-face meetings at least every 6 months

Year 2

A detailed Year 2 Implementation Plan will build on increased community awareness and emerging experiences and learning from Year 1 but may include:

- A second Leadership Institute: recruit participants from new communities; led by members of first Institute
- On-ongoing opportunities for face-to-face meetings to share stories and learning
- Development of additional on-line ways to stay connected and provide support (Skype, ECEBC website, Wiki space)
- Second Leadership Track at ECEBC Conference in 2010
- Possible Summer Institute at Capilano College or other post-secondary institutions

Years 3-5

An Implementation Plan for Years 3-5 will emerge through the experiences and learnings of Year 1 & 2 participants but will need to address

- Continued support for leadership development including possible modules articulated to post-secondary credentials
- Development of plans for funding so networking and mentoring can continue