Table of Contents

Early Childhood Education is indexed in CBCA Education.

Kindergarten School, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1912 (Glenbow Archives, NA-3267-38)

From the Editor's Desk

Dear friends and colleagues A characteristic of a profession is its understanding of a shared history. It is timely to engage readers of *Early Childhood Education* in thinking about the history of our field as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teacher's Association. Many ideas concerning early childhood education are transnational in origin, meaning that they reflect global (western) trends and broad social movements. These come to life in our local communities, visible in the work of our colleagues, through the experience of the children in our classrooms, and in written curricula, textbooks, and learning materials.

Kindergarten in Alberta has a long history. The Kindergarten School operated in Lethbridge from 1907 to 1924, housed in a purpose-built schoolroom that still stands.

Yet the kindergarten in Lethbridge may not have been the first in Alberta. The Department of Education's *Annual Report* for 1907 noted that

> The first kindergarten established in Alberta in connection with public schools was opened in September in Wetaskiwin. The director teaches this department during the forenoon, and is supervisor of music and drawing during the afternoons. The work has been conducted skillfully and the experiment has fulfilled the expectations of the most optimistic. (p 42)

More information on the Wetaskiwin program is in the *Alexandra High School Souvenir* for the year 1909. This early version of a school yearbook described the classes in the Wetaskiwin school from kindergarten to Grade 12. Details on the kindergarten included the names of the kindergarten teacher, Mrs R E Terry (see photo) and her assistant Dorothea Wyld. Children were admitted from five years of age, and the enrolment was more than 50, with daily attendance averaging 35. The publication described a "Kindergarten Department," though there was only a single classroom. This was equipped with a "piano, tables, chairs, rings, and
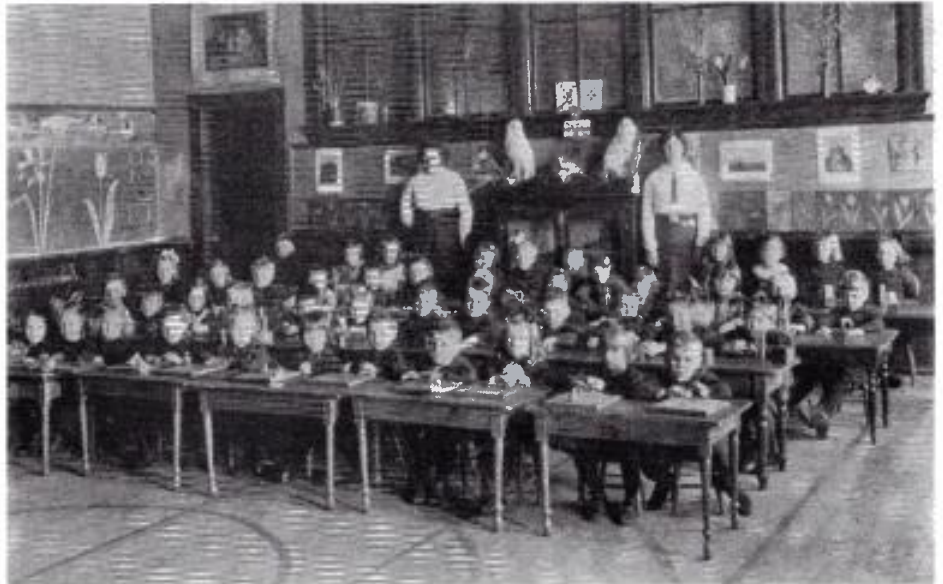
Kindergarten Department, Alexandra School, Wetaskiwin, 1914 (Alberta Department of Education 1914)

the usual moulding boards, sand tray and paper" (p 19). The curriculum included lessons in

> orderly conduct, and a due regard for the rights and feelings of others. First instruction is given in drawing, building and numbers, and [the child] is taught that school is an attractive place, not [one] of work only, which dulls the mind as well as the natural instincts of the child.

These statements indicated that the teachers used a progressive approach in their classes, suggesting that their program was aligned with the ideas of New Education. More than 100 years have passed since the opening of the first kindergartens in Alberta, in Lethbridge and Wetaskiwin. While we have much to celebrate, there is still significant work ahead to ensure that the promise of early childhood education is met to empower children and families from all backgrounds.

References

Alberta Department of Education. 1907. *Annual Report*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Department of Education.

———. 1914. *Annual Report*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Department of Education.

Alexandra High School Souvenir. 1909. Wetaskiwin, Alta: Alexandra High School. Available at www.ourroots.ca/e/ (accessed October 16, 2016). 🛓

Larry Prochner

What Do Trial Balloons, Bubbles and Popping Have to Do with Programming in Early Childhood Education Programs?

Beverlie Dietze and Diane Kashin

Beverlie Dietze, PhD, is the current director of learning and teaching at Okanagan College in Kelowna, British Columbia. She has been researching the state of outdoor play in Canada since 1997. She has published several articles on staff development and outdoor play topics and three textbooks on early childhood education, two of them coauthored with Diane Kashin. She is the coordinator and a lead researcher of the project Building Capacity—Creating Specialized Outdoor Play Training to Empower Children's Experiences, funded by the Lawson Foundation.

Diane Kashin, EdD, teaches at Ryerson University and consults in early childhood education. Her research interests include emergent curriculum and nature pedagogy. She and Beverlie Dietze have coauthored a number of research articles and two early childhood textbooks published by Pearson Canada. Diane Kashin is currently a research lead on a project on outdoor play and learning funded by the Lawson Foundation.

Introduction

Children's play and experiences in early learning programs are influenced by many factors including environmental designs (Fjortoft, Kristoffersen and Sageie 2009), the materials available to support play and the roles that children and adults engage in during the play. There are many program models that guide early learning professionals in developing curriculum for young children. While many provinces across Canada have developed early childhood curriculum frameworks (Langford 2010), educators are still able to take an individualistic approach to curriculum development. A child-centred pedagogy (Langford 2010) encourages early learning professionals to plan experiences from children's demonstrated interests. These interests may be triggered from dialogue, observations, and experiences between and among children and adults, and by environmental attributes.

Regardless of the philosophical tenets or frameworks that are used to guide the curriculum,

MacNaughton (2003) determined that "early childhood educators act in particular ways with young children and develop curriculum for them based on their understanding of how children learn, how they make sense of their surroundings and how they form relationships" (p 9). Creating environments where children feel a sense of belonging and have positive and empowering relationships with others is essential for optimal exploration and engagement in experiences for learning. This is the responsibility of educators if their pedagogical approach is child centred. This does not mean that the curriculum is directed by the child; instead, it opens up possibilities for everyone, including children, to examine their worlds and investigate areas of interest that intrigue them. From a social constructivist world view, learning is a social process that has numerous benefits to young children in developing competencies, risk-taking and self-regulation skills (Dietze and Kashin 2016; Vygotsky 1978).

Social constructivist learning occurs through intense participation and is recognized as a powerful form of learning (Rogoff et al 2003). When children's strengths and talents are acknowledged, full engagement is more likely to occur, especially when their interests are supported and embraced within their family, culture and society. Children's ways of expressing their ideas, their interests and their sources of creating knowledge about their world vary. When adults engage with children, the children's interest in their surroundings and their motivation are strengthened (Katz and Chard 1990). From a constructivist approach, early learning professionals serve as provocateurs and facilitators to help children identify their interests and experience rich and intriguing opportunities for explorations and discoveries. *Constructivism* refers to knowledge that is acquired through active involvement with content and experimentation

(Kashin 2009). Social-constructivism, based on Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, suggests that early learning professionals and children "co-learn, co-research and co-construct knowledge" (Stuhmcke 2012, 7). This means that social context and environmental factors are highly significant in children's level of engagement with their environment (Stuhmcke 2012). Creating environments that entice children and stimulate their interests and curiosity becomes a fundamental role of early learning professionals.

The concept of curiosity has been studied and published about in a variety of disciplines since the 1950s. As outlined by Arnone et al, (2011), Piaget (1952) posited that curiosity is a way that children make sense of their world. He suggested that when children are in the right environment and can act upon their curiosity, they seek answers to the things that trigger their interest. This process is linked to their cognitive development processes and is the foundation for learning. Berlyne's (1978) seminal work examined curiosity through a neurophysiological lens. He suggested that four forms of curiosity could be used to analyze children's play behaviour: perceptual curiosity, epistemic curiosity, specific curiosity and diverse curiosity. *Perceptual curiosity* is described as an interest in and attention to novel perceptual stimulation, which can lead children to engage in further visual and sensory exploration. *Epistemic curiosity* refers to a quest for knowledge and is influenced by the people, materials and experiences offered within early learning environments to support children's play. *Specific curiosity* is identified as a desire to seek out specific information or knowledge on a topic, such as when children become interested in items or experiences available in their environments. *Diverse curiosity* can best be described as being similar to being bored and seeking stimulation to bring a sense of excitement into the environment. Diverse curiosity is prevalent in outdoor playgrounds that have equipment that is not challenging to children or not aligned with their skills and interests (Arnone et al 2011).

Early childhood professionals influence children's experiences and the depth of play that they engage in (Dietze and Kashin 2012). Adult attitudes toward children's play and exploration can either facilitate children's opportunities and desires to be curious or create barriers that reduce their motivation to act upon their sense of wonderment (Chak 2007). When children's curiosity is sparked and their desire to explore heightened, more in-depth, long-term exploration occurs (Chak 2007; Driscoll and Lownds 2007). Children have higher levels of exploration, discovery and learning in environments with unique resources and experiences and where curiosity is honoured (Perry 2001).

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach practiced in Reggio Emilia, Italy, some educators in Canada use provocations or invitations in the environment as a way to spark children's curiosity. *Provocations* are the deliberate and thoughtful actions taken by adults or children that provoke or extend children's sense of wonder and thinking, such as adding unique displays or materials to various parts of the environment. As described by Gandini (1998), provocation is something arriving by surprise. Provocation is a means for provoking further action and exploration (Fraser and Gestwicki 2000), which is related to sparking children's curiosity and their desire to explore ideas and possibilities in depth. The idea of trial balloons could serve as a means or a tool to begin the process of triggering children's interests and ideas and be a precursor to provocations and invitations.

Current Study

The purpose of this study was for the authors to explore the idea of introducing a new concept known as *trial balloons* into early learning program planning to support early learning professionals in gaining insight into children's interests and ideas. The traditional concept of trial balloons is not new; however, using it as a program planning strategy is a new concept in early learning programming.

The term *trial balloons* may have originated in 1782 with Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier, when they began testing the idea of releasing hot air balloons into the environment.[1] The brothers observed what happened to each balloon in an effort to seek information on the level of safety of their idea. Since the term *trial balloons* was initially coined, its usage has evolved as a way to describe examining whether an idea, a product or an action is worth developing.

The authors were inspired to search for a new process that could be used by early learning professionals before using provocations by discussions at a national conference with more than 50 early learning professionals, who expressed concerns about investing time into planning for provocations without knowing if children would be drawn toward the materials or intrigued with an idea or action. These concerns led the researchers to explore two core questions. First, is there a process that early learning professionals could use to gauge a child's interest in an idea, material or

[1] Some information about the brothers and their invention is available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgolfier_brothers (accessed November 15, 2016).

experience before a provocation? Second, would a process such as the trial balloon concept help early learning professionals to gain insight into the level of interest that children have about potential materials, ideas, or environmental places or designs? The researchers were curious to explore how the trial balloon concept could provide early learning professionals with a program planning process that would provide insight into the types of experiences and environmental factors that would support co-constructivism between and among children and adults.

Research Methodology

This study employed narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method that uses a process of studying, examining, and using discourse or writing to bring meaning to questions, experiences or perspectives (Meier and Stremmel 2010). Drawing on Dewey's position that educators examine the past–present–future continuum of experience, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) asserted that individuals' lives are stories—stories that unfold over time, with experience, reflection and new meaning.

The authors engaged in a process of writings about their observations of program planning in the early childhood sector, including their thinking about how children play and learn and the strategies that early childhood educators use for program planning. They documented their reflections about their ideas of a trial balloon concept, in both pictorial and story concepts. They first examined their various writings and concepts separately and then combined their works for a collaborative exploration and discussion. This process helped them to be able to "pull out narrative threads that hold together the interwoven fabric of past, present and future lives and their personal and professional selves" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 15). As well, by looking at their individual and collective concepts, they were able to make sense of their perceptions about trial balloons as a programming process in early childhood settings with children three to five years of age. When they determined that they had workable ideas and articulated their "Aha!" thoughts about the benefits of trial balloons, they engaged in further exploration. They re-examined and reflected upon their documented learning stories to seek out themes and patterns that would clarify whether and how trial balloons could promote children's curiosity triggers within their play spaces. As part of the narrative inquiry, the researchers drew upon a co-constructivism approach, gaining new knowledge from both the similar and the varying insights and perspectives shared.

Data Collection

Throughout the 2013/14 academic year, the authors began an exchange of ideas about whether and how the concept of trial balloons would work with children between the ages of three and five years in early learning programs. Drawing on the ways in which marketing consultants use the concept of trial balloons, the researchers shared ideas about using a trial balloons approach as a method to test children's sense of curiosity on topical issues or materials. They sketched out ideas, using a combination of mind mapping with word and pictorial representations to visualize the concept as a programming strategy.

1. The authors examined the concept of trial balloons using the following questions as a lens and a way to develop new conceptualizations for this idea.
2. If we think about the concept of trial balloons from an early childhood education perspective, what might it look like? How might this process support early learning professionals in advancing the potential of children's curiosity being triggered?

How might the concept of trial balloons be expanded to a programming process? What might that programming process look like? Would the concept of trial balloons add value to children's experiences?

The concepts were sketched out by one researcher and critiqued by the other. This was followed by collaborative discussions, which led to further adjustments to the concept. A back-and-forth process occurred between the two researchers throughout the process. Each researcher asked focused questions of the other to attempt to bring clarity to the idea. As they explored the concept more fully, they used focused questions, experiences or materials or a combination of all three as part of their strategy to "float" ideas. Each time they floated a trial balloon, they recorded their personal perception of whether such a strategy had merit for further consideration. Then they discussed their perceptions with one another. As those discussions took place, notes were taken and examined individually to determine themes, and recurring themes, that evolved from the onset of the project. This back-and-forth process and reflection allowed for the idea of using trial balloons in programming to remain fluid. The researchers drew upon their reflections as a way of making meaning and to visualize how trial balloons could be used in early childhood programming. Using a constant comparative analysis to identify themes, perceptions and ideas within the data helped them to see strengths and gaps if the concept were to be

adapted as a programming strategy. As they explored the concept, the depth and breadth of the concept expanded to include *bubbles* and *popping*. Their exchanges led to them to create a number of ideas about the bubbles and popping and then discover how the model aligned and supported child-initiated processes and, just as important, advance the depth of programming in early learning programs that would have meaning for children.

Results

The concept of using trial balloons as a process to gain insight into the types of provocations that may be introduced to children in their play is new to the literature. The process of examining the core questions about the concept of trial balloons revealed a shared belief that the concept has a place in the early learning programming process.

The authors lived the floating trial balloons idea in their research. The more ideas they floated about

how trial balloons could support children's programming, the clearer the benefits became of using the concept with early learning professionals and children. They extended the concept to include *bubbles*. Bubbles were viewed as transient objects that children connect with and can last a wondrous moment in time. Building on the perspective that materials in an inspiring environment can act as a third teacher (Gandini 1998; Fraser 2011), it became clear that trial balloons could be the forerunner to producing bubbles of programming experiences to support children's curiosity, exploration and learning.

In combining the idea of balloons and bubbles, the commonality between the two became apparent—they *pop*! As the researchers examined those two components in relation to children, ideas about how balloons and bubbles bring joy, ignite wonder and spark curiosity became clearer. The POPPING process (see Table 1.1) has the potential to further provoke minds and expand learning. This extends thinking about what is possible.

Program Design		Professional Responsibilities
P	Provocations for play	Set the stage and provide children with the bubbles and balloons to begin the playful process.
O	Observation, documentation and interpretation	Own your voice as a professional engaging with children in this playful process.
P	Keeping a **project**/inquiry, or multiple projects/inquiries, going	Based on observation, documentation, and interpretation, build your program in collaboration with others while you continue to observe, document and interpret.
P	Planning for future experience	Conceptualize learning questions that will lead the inquiry and identify the project to be undertaken. Consider the whole of the project through its title. Have it reflect its collaborative nature.
I	Identifying interests	As part of the interpretative process, identify the interests of the children, but be careful not to trivialize. Look for authentic and meaningful interests that can provide future experiences.
N	Next steps	Like a bubble, the project or inquiry cannot last forever. A balloon cannot stay inflated forever. Plan for the transition. What are your next steps?
G	Group growth	Document your group and community experiences, including the growth and development of all the players.

Table 1.1 Program Popping (Dietze and Kashin 2016).

As the idea of combining bubbles and balloons evolved and was considered metaphorically, the authors theorized that each can trigger, prompt, provoke or expand curiosity. When the concepts of trial balloons and bubbles are combined, they can guide program design in early learning programs. Table 1.1 provides an overview of how trial balloons and bubbles bring a new perspective to programming to early learning environments.

When a trial balloon is launched by children or adults and if the idea becomes of interest to children, it has the potential to "spiral into learning that has no beginning or end," much like the metaphor of a tangle of spaghetti that Malaguzzi (1998) used to describe knowledge (p 131). The newly formed concept of *trial balloons, bubbles* and *popping* creates a visual that has merit for early learning programs, because the emergent nature of the spiral of learning supports a child-centred pedagogy within a social constructivist environment.

Discussion

There are benefits of drawing upon research and processes from different disciplines, such as using the marketing strategy of trial balloons to seek insight into thoughts and perspectives of constituents. Using the concept of trial balloons requires a thoughtful and planned process. Early learning professionals gain a deeper understanding of potential opportunities with and for children when using new processes or ideas in their practice. Engaging in discussions with peers and critical friends (Bullough, Knowles and Crow 1992) to explore the core questions of *if, what, why, when* and *how* about the potential of launching a trial balloon brought forth the development of the model. Documentation and discussions may bring value to colleagues and children that trigger their ideas, points of view or processes to a point where a vision for a trial balloon could be formulated. Critical dialogue with colleagues about trial balloons and the popping process may be needed to fully understand their purpose, benefits and strategies in the programming process. Launching trial balloons is intended to be a collaborative experience used to experiment with ideas to spark curiosity, create new options for children's play and scaffold opportunities (Dietze and Kashin 2016; Malaguzzi 1998).

Floating trial balloons is like planting seeds—the intent is to germinate ideas, fertilize children's thinking and actions and nurture new experiences or dimensions for exploration that children have not necessarily encountered before. This new programming perspective positions early learning professionals to support and promote exploratory,

experiential learning, dialogue and reflection that could lead to new knowledge creation. The more collective exploratory work that is examined in early childhood programs, the more likelihood curiosity will be aroused and new learning will be transferred to practice (Harris and Chrispeels 2008; Harris and Jones 2010; Webster-Wright 2009). This supports early learning professionals in envisioning children's ideas in relation to their philosophy about how children learn through play.

When early learning professionals think about and practise programming in a particular way, there is potential for the experiences, programming and opportunities extended to children to become stagnant. Because they challenge early learning professionals' perspectives, thinking processes, experiences, beliefs and values in relation to theoretical frameworks and practices, the trial balloon and popping processes have the potential to provide a more complex and comprehensive understanding of children's interests and opportunities for new knowledge creation or "Aha!" moments (Sherman 2009).

Future Research

The concept of *trial balloons, bubbles* and the *POPPING* process brings a new lens to programming in early learning programs. Combining the trial balloon concept with observations, pedagogical documentation and reflections adds new knowledge and tools for early learning professionals that are focused on designing environments that offer curiosity triggers to children. For this reason, this concept is worthy of having early learning professionals test this programming process to see its strengths, opportunities, gaps and weaknesses in relation to their program philosophy and current programming practices.

Conclusion

Creating environments and experiences that trigger children's sense of curiosity is highly participative and fluid in nature. Early learning professionals can support children's sense of curiosity and wonderment by making conscious efforts to bring new ideas, materials or options for exploration into the environment. Early learning professionals draw upon their program documentation, observations and understandings about children and their partners in learning, pedagogy and context (Hedges and Cullen 2012) to seek insight into children's interests. The idea of using the concept of *floating balloons* and *popping* as strategies for engaging children in exploring

potential opportunities provides a unique way to gain insight into children's interests and expand upon strategies for extending children's play.

By using the *trial balloon, bubble* and *POPPING* metaphor, early learning professionals may have a new approach to programming that could lead to a different type of dialogue about potential experiences. This approach could trigger new ideas among both children and adults, leading to new interests, experiences and knowledge creation. The combined process of using trial balloons and examining the process through the *bubble* and *POPPING* metaphor invites early learning professionals to engage in discourse with colleagues. This could lead them to gain a deeper understanding of children's interests and areas that trigger their curiosity. The importance of early learning professionals continuously seeking ways to support children in being curious reinforces the benefits of using trial balloons in the programming process.

References

Arnone, M, R Small, S Shauncey and H P McKenna. 2011. "Curiosity, Interest and Engagement in Technology-Pervasive Learning Environments: A New Research Agenda." *Education Technology Research Development* 59, no 2: 181–98.

Berlyne, D E. 1978. "Curiosity and Learning." *Motivation and Emotion* 2, no 2: 97–175.

Bullough, R, G Knowles and N Crow. 1992. *Emerging as a Teacher.* New York: Routledge.

Chak, A. 2007. "Teachers' and Parents' Conceptions of Children's Curiosity and Exploration." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 15, no 2: 141–59.

Connelly, F M, and D J Clandinin. 2006. "Narrative Inquiry." In *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research,* 3rd ed, ed J L Green, G Camilli and P Elmore, 477–87. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Dietze, B, and D Kashin. 2012. *Playing and Learning in Early Childhood Education.* Toronto: Pearson Canada.

———. 2016. *Empowering Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education.* Toronto: Pearson Canada.

Driscoll, E, and N Lownds. 2007. "The Garden Wonder Wall: Fostering Wonder and Curiosity on Multi-Day Garden Field Trips." *Applied Environmental Education and Communication* 6, no 1: 105–12.

Fjørtoft, I, B Kristoffersen and J Sageie. 2009. "Children in Schoolyards: Tracking Movement Patterns and Physical Activity in Schoolyards Using Global Positioning System and Heart Rate Monitoring." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 93, no 3–4: 210–17.

Fraser, S. 2011. *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom.* 3rd ed. Scarborough, Ont: Nelson.

Fraser, S, and C Gestwicki. 2000. *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom.* Scarborough, Ont: Nelson.

Gandini, L. 1998. "Educational and Caring Spaces." *In The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach—Advanced Reflections,* ed C Edwards, L Gandini and G Forman, 161–78. Greenwich, Conn: Ablex.

Harris, A, and J Chrispeels, eds. 2008. *Improving Schools and Educational Systems: International Perspectives.* London: Routledge.

Harris, A, and M Jones. 2010. "Professional Learning Communities and System Improvements." *Improving Schools* 13, no 2: 171–81.

Hedges, H, and J Cullen. 2012. "Participatory Learning Theories: A Framework for Early Childhood Pedagogy." *Early Child Development and Care* 182, no 7: 921–40.

Kashin, D. 2009. *Reaching the Top of the Mountain: The Impact of Emergent Curriculum on the Practice and Self-Image of Early Childhood Educators.* Köln: Lambert.

Katz, L, and S C Chard. 2000. *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach.* 2nd ed. Stamford, Conn: Ablex.

Knowles, J G, and A L Cole. 2008. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.

Langford, R. 2010. *Innovations in Provincial Early Learning Curriculum Frameworks.* Occasional Paper No 24. Toronto: Ryerson University, Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

MacNaughton, G. 2003. *Shaping Early Childhood: Learners, Curriculum and Contexts.* Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Malaguzzi, L. 1998. "History, Ideas and Basic Philosophy: An Interview with Lella Gandini." In *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach—Advanced Reflections,* ed C Edwards, L Gandini and G Forman, 49–97. Greenwich, Conn: Ablex.

Meier, D R, and A J Stremmel. 2010. "Reflection Through Narrative: The Power of Narrative Inquiry in Early Childhood Teacher Education." *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 31, no 3: 249–57.

Perry, B. 2001. "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the Cycle of Violence." Available at www.childtrauma.org/CTAMATERIALS/incubated.asp.

Piaget, J. 1952. *The Origins of Intelligence in Children.* New York: International Universities Press.

Rogoff, B, R Paradise, R M Arauz, M Correa-Chávez and C Angelillo. 2003. "Firsthand Learning Through Intent Participation." *Annual Review of Psychology* 54: 175–203.

Sherman, S C. 2009. "Haven't We Seen This Before? Sustaining a Vision in Teacher Education for Progressive Teaching Practice." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no 4: 41–60.

Stuhmcke, S. 2012. "Children as Change Agents for Sustainability." Professional doctorate thesis, Queensland University of Technology.

Vygotsky, L. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* 14th ed. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Webster-Wright, A. 2009. "Reframing Professional Development Through Understanding Authentic Professional Learning." *Review of Educational Research* 79, no 2: 702–39.

Cross-Cultural Interpretations of the Teacher Role in "Learning Through Play" Pedagogy

Christine Massing

Christine Massing, PhD, is an assistant professor in early childhood education at the University of Regina and a former classroom teacher. This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Killam Trusts.

Abstract

While learning through play is a common pedagogical approach in Canadian early childhood classrooms, it is dissonant with the didactic, teacher-directed methods used in many cultural contexts. Based on data from a one-year ethnographic research study with African immigrant and refugee early childhood teacher education students, this article explores their perspectives on play-based approaches in relation to their own experiences with play and learning "back home." The findings suggest that the participants experienced tensions with respect to the role of the teacher because they believed that when teachers assumed a facilitator or observer role, children did not have the same opportunity to learn important cultural and religious values such as respect.

Introduction

Informed by constructivist views of teaching, *learning through play* is one of the primary pedagogical approaches used in North American early childhood classrooms. Such an approach generally assumes that the child directs such play and exploration by choosing materials, themes and partners, while the teacher's role varies from playing alongside the children and asking open-ended questions to simply observing them and documenting their learning. However, in many cultural contexts, learning and play are quite separate; play is to be free and unsupervised, while learning is viewed as teacher directed and occurring in school contexts. This disjuncture can potentially lead to conflicts between teachers who embrace play-based approaches and culturally diverse families who bring different ideas about the relationship between play and learning. Using data from a study of East African immigrant/refugee women studying in an early childhood teacher education program, this article focuses on the students' interpretations of "learning through play" in Canadian early childhood education (ECE) settings in relation to their own experiences in their country of origin. The importance of cultural and religious values, such as respect for one's elders, undergirded their beliefs about the central role of the adult in structuring and directing learning.

Theoretical Framework

The study is framed by sociocultural theory, informed by the work of Vygotsky (1978), which is premised on the assumption that individuals develop and learn through active engagement with others in specific contexts (such as home, school and community). Expert peers or adults guide children in gaining competence in the skills, practices and knowledges that are valued in those contexts. Socialization patterns thus differ depending on cultural and familial values, beliefs and priorities in child-rearing, and may shift or be altered depending on the context of development (Grusec and Davidov 2010; Heath 1983; Rogoff et al 1993; Super and Harkness 1986). In dominant western contexts, Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) explains, young children are often socialized for cognitive competence; therefore, abstract reasoning, extensive verbalization and "school-like" literacy and numeracy skills are actively promoted to ensure school success. Adults are more likely to play with children or engage in face-to-face verbal conversations or interactions to enhance

these skills (Haight, Parke and Black 1997; Rogoff 1990). In contrast, cultures that prioritize social competence emphasize the development of respect, obedience, responsibility and social skills (Kağitçibaşi 2007). Accordingly, adults might reinforce such values by maintaining more physical distance from children, not playing with them beyond infancy and directing their behaviour. In general, Rogoff (1990) argues that adults structure children's socializing experiences by making arrangements for their activities, toys or play materials, and play or other interactional partners that are reflective of their cultural or familial goals. While various scholars have studied aspects of such cross-cultural differences, the cultural and religious values influencing these socialization patterns are an underresearched topic (Livas-Dlott et al 2010), particularly in African immigrant and refugee groups. For the immigrant/refugee women who participated in this study, the disjuncture between these two sets of socialization goals was evidenced by their perspectives on the role of the adult during learning through play in the Canadian context.

Methodology

The primary site for the research was a single class in an early childhood program in a community college in a mid-sized city in western Canada. I collected data for at least two to three full days a week over three semesters of study in the college, the community and early childhood field placement sites. Qualitative data were collected in the form of observational field notes, interviews, focus groups, informal conversations, spatial maps, document collection and analytic memos. Four Canadian instructors and 20 first-generation immigrant/ refugee students consented to the research. I focus here on the participants from Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Congo and Ethiopia), all but one of whom were Muslim. I analyzed the data inductively by chunking the data into categories, developing a coding framework, engaging in focused coding of the data and completing a pattern-level analysis to identify themes. These analyses elucidated the participants' various experiences and perspectives on play and learning.

Findings

Play "Back Home"

The participants recalled their childhood play as free and largely unsupervised by adults, involving natural or repurposed materials, and occurring in outdoor environments. Although many participants had played with dolls, more frequently they had used natural materials, such as leaves and sticks, as Ameena explained: "Our toys are outside ... We make things together, we create together. Children make their own toys, yeah, natural" (focus group). Such materials were used in freely chosen, child-directed forms of play such as sociodramatic play ("playing house"), explorations of the environment or games with rules (skipping or hopscotch).

Once children could walk independently, the participants explained, they would play outdoors with other children. As Ameena recalled, "Mostly we played outside with other children, with the neighbours. It's not like here. They just send you outside ... We play outside, we enjoy and then we come back, like, night time" (interview). Numerous participants explained that parents gave the older children some instructions, and they then ensured that the younger ones respected these strictures. Regardless of the age difference between siblings, Fatima stated, "you have to respect them—or anybody who's older than you." Geena commented that adults rarely supervised or intervened in their play, but "if you make any mistake your brother or sister or neighbours will tell (the parents)" (focus group). Beyond infancy, adults did not act as children's play partners; as Katrina emphasized, "You cannot see the woman of the house, or the adult of the house, go and sit in the street and play (with the children)" (focus group).

Learning "Back Home"

Coming from countries where child care or preschool programs were either nonexistent or highly uncommon, the participants associated learning solely with the context of formal schooling. One participant began school in kindergarten, while the others, all Muslim, attended *madrassa* or religious school starting at age four or five, then went to school the following year. Even though the participants came from fairly affluent families, most remembered having only paper, pencils and the occasional book in their early years classrooms. Bijou declared, "It's just in our minds and we write it down, no materials" (interview). Similarly, Christa confirmed that "In Africa they still don't use technology in school. In your head is the answer to everything" (focus group). The few puzzles and games they had at Geena's private preschool were permitted for use only "in the hall area," not the classroom, thus clearly demarcating the different contexts for play and for learning (interview). Ameena emphatically stated that "Our toys were outside ... You play outside" (interview).

In their schooling, the teacher employed a didactic approach whereby she or he transmitted

information to the children, which the children were then responsible for copying and repeating over and over until memorized. Fatima further explained that "You have homework. You read all evening and then in the morning when you go (to school) you don't look at the writing. He takes one part and you have to say it by heart" (interview). Teachers were positioned as authorities in their school experiences, as described by Bijou: "The teacher makes the rules. He asks the questions and you only have the right to talk when he asks you a question ... They are in control of everything" (focus group). Young children began learning these rules, along with the Koran and Arabic language, in the *madrassa*. Obeying the teacher was strictly enforced, often through physical punishment. Therefore the respect for elders taught within the home extended into the school, as Fatima affirmed: "We teach the children your teacher is your second mother, like respect" (focus group). Asmaa added that in school young children are "learning the rules. They teach you how to respect the older people" (focus group). Accordingly, school-based learning was structured in such a way as to reinforce the teaching of the "same values" as in the home (interview, Geena).

Tensions Around Learning Through Play

Given the separation between play and learning in the participants' own experiences, when they were introduced to learning through play as a pedagogical approach in Canadian settings, various tensions became evident around the context, interactional patterns, materials and curriculum content. However, the adult role was the overarching area of dissonance because, in their experiences, children were not seen to learn important cultural and religious values such as respect when the adult shifted from the role of a director to that of a facilitator or play partner.

First of all, the participants viewed play and learning as occurring in distinct contexts: play happens outdoors and learning indoors. Correspondingly, they perceived indoor spaces as domains where the teacher exerted authority and children obeyed, which was at odds with their observations of children in Canadian classrooms who directed their own activities. It should be noted that even during the participants' seemingly free and unstructured play time "back home," children were expected to follow the directions of their older siblings, acting under the authority of parents. These experiences thus introduced the value of respect for one's elders in order to prepare children

for the *madrassa* and formal schooling, wherein the structure was even more explicitly designed to reinforce such beliefs.

The hierarchical positioning of adults as authority figures "back home" was bolstered by maintaining distance from children, which diverged from the normative interactional patterns in Canadian ECE sites, where the teachers were at the child's level. As Ameena explained: "We never sit with the children face to face. We don't talk that much" (interview). To show respect, Geena added, "If children talk to older people, no eye contact" (focus group). Coming from contexts where "a quiet child is a good child" (focus group), the participants felt that Canadian teachers and children alike "talk too much." The participants were similarly unaccustomed to asking children open-ended questions to understand or extend their understanding of concepts in play, because the adults in their lives had mainly asked closed-ended questions designed to manage their behaviour (eg, "What are you doing?") or test their knowledge (eg, "What is this?").

In addition, since the participants had used a very limited array of materials in their play and schooling "back home," many of the materials in early childhood sites were seen as distracting and superfluous, serving only to diminish the positioning of the teacher as the main transmitter of knowledge. Some participants, like Christa, were especially dismissive of how materials are used to support constructivist approaches: "In Canada, children learn about toys ... In Africa, there are no puzzles like in Canada. Children know how to read. They know how to count. No puzzles. They learn from the teacher" (focus group). Unsurprisingly, when participants saw teachers assuming an observer or facilitator role, these participants interpreted play with toys as a vehicle for learning about the materials themselves rather than for appropriating concepts.

Furthermore, the participants believed that learning literacy and numeracy skills was the central task of early schooling, but they were not persuaded that children could construct these understandings without direct teaching. As other studies have confirmed (eg, Tobin, Arzubiaga and Adair 2013), this prioritization of academic skills is especially common among immigrant families. Geena explained

> The basic things like reading, story time is very important. I don't know why they think play is important [in Canada]. If we are learning ABCs, we have to sit in a desk, not like here playing and learning ABCs, like, we had to sit and I had a pencil and tried to write ABC or 123 ... No playing. You can't play while you

are learning. If you want to play, you play outside ..." (interview).

Since the participants perceived the teacher to be the sole conduit through which children learned concepts in school, they felt concerned when children were simply left to, as Geena stated, "do things by themselves" (focus group). They maintained that such a shift in the teacher role was not necessarily an efficacious means of teaching academic skills in the early years.

Discussion and Implications

Overall, these participants' own experiences with play and schooling were inscribed with specific cultural and religious values that resonated with the pattern of socializing for social competence (that is, respect for elders and obedience). These socialization goals were in conflict with the goal of socializing for cognitive competence in Canadian ECE settings in which the adult assumed a more indirect teaching role, conversing and playing with the children. While Pels (2003) found that Moroccan newcomer parents prioritized their children's academic achievement slightly above values such as respect and obedience, the findings in this study suggest that these participants believed that, in the early years, children must first learn values and then could be introduced to academic skills. Research with newcomer families has demonstrated that parents' beliefs and priorities shift over time, particularly if they think that the practices used in early schooling are designed to support their child's success in the new context (Isik-Ercan 2010; Song and Wang 2006; Tobin, Arzubiaga and Adair 2013). Certainly the participants in this study did come to appreciate play-based learning and incorporated some new approaches into their own practice, though they had difficulty shifting fully from a director role to that of a facilitator.

The participants strongly believed that the role of the adult is critical in establishing a context for academic learning. As Asmaa asserted, "They have to learn behaviour, and we teach them what is good and what is bad" (focus group). Consistent with other studies with different immigrant groups (Li 2001; Lahman and Park 2004; Pels 2003; Vandenbroeck, Roets and Snoeck, 2009), then, they found Canadian classrooms to be quite permissive and worried that the relative freedom children enjoyed would cause them to become disrespectful. Geena lamented that "The children here know everything is optional" (interview). Even though children develop prosocial skills such as getting along with others and learning to respect others (older and younger) through their play

(Colliver 2016), differing cultural interpretations of respect coupled with the reduced authority of the adult were seen to compromise such teachings in the Canadian context. Pedagogical documentation may be one means of making the teaching and learning of values (ie, character education) such as respect more visible to families. However, it is important to note that cross-cultural studies indicate that a directive or controlling parenting style does not necessarily mean that parents lack warmth and, consequently, can have a very positive impact on the child's development and learning outcomes (Grusec and Davidov 2010; Kağitçibaşi 2007; Kermani and Brenner 2000).

When immigrant and refugee children experience a mismatch between the socialization goals in the home and in the school, it can lead to challenges in their adjustment processes (Ali 2008; Kağitçibaşi 2007). While teachers cannot reproduce the role of the adult as conceived by these participants, eliciting familial socialization goals and practices through sustained conversations, home visits or informal events allows teachers to observe families in order to better understand and affirm home knowledges (González, Moll and Amanti 2005; López, Scribner and Mahitivanichcha 2001). Such strategies may allow teachers to employ what Rogoff (1990) refers to as *bridging*; that is, using their knowledges as a familiar base from which new ways of teaching and learning can be understood and enacted. Furthermore, Bodrova, Germeroth and Leong (2013) posit that it is important to find a balance between overly structured, academic programs and play-based programs in which the teacher simply provides time, space and materials and then follows the child's lead. Scaffolding children's play to extend their learning is one means of addressing this dilemma (Bodrova 2008). Some possible strategies might include pointing out relevant features of the task (or play), controlling the child's frustration, demonstration or modelling, helping the child use toys and props symbolically, developing the child's understandings of various scenarios and roles, and maintaining the child's motivation and interest (Bodrova 2008; Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976). As Kermani and Brenner (2000) found, culturally diverse children may respond better to scaffolding strategies that are more aligned with their cultural values and socialization patterns, such as providing instructional directives, modelling and correction. Sensitive intervention on the part of the teacher, then, can serve to reassure families that the teacher is directly involved in learning through play and that the children are not left to learn by themselves.

References

Ali, M A. 2008. "Loss of Parenting Self-Efficacy Among Immigrant Parents." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 9, no 2: 148–60.

Bodrova, E. 2008. "Make-Believe Play Versus Academic Skills: A Vygotskian Approach to Today's Dilemma of Early Childhood Education." *European Early Childhood Education Journal* 16, no 3: 357–69.

Bodrova, E, C Germeroth and D J Leong. 2013. "Play and Self-Regulation: Lessons from Vygotsky." *American Journal of Play* 6, no 1: 111–23.

Colliver, Y. 2016. "Mothers' Perspectives on Learning Through Play in the Home." *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 41, no 1: 4–12.

González, N, L C Moll and C Amanti, eds. 2005. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Grusec, J E, and M Davidov. 2010. "Integrating Different Perspectives on Socialization Theory and Research: A Domain-Specific Approach." *Child Development* 81, no 3: 687–709.

Haight, W L, R D Parke and J E Black. 1997. "Mothers' and Fathers' Beliefs About Spontaneous Participation in Their Toddlers' Pretend Play." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 43, no 2: 271–90.

Heath, S B. 1983. *Ways with Words: Language Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: New York: Cambridge University Press.

Isik-Ercan, Z. 2010. "Looking at School from the House Window: Learning from Turkish-American Parents' Experiences with Early Elementary Education in the United States." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 38, no 2: 133–42.

Kağitçibaşi Ç. 2007. *Family, Self, and Human Development Across Cultures: Theory and Applications*. 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kermani, H, and M E Brenner. 2000. "Maternal Scaffolding in the Child's Zone of Proximal Development Across Tasks: Cross-Cultural Perspectives." *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 15, no 1: 30–52.

Lahman, M K E, and S Park. 2004. "Understanding Children from Diverse Cultures: Bridging Perspectives of Parents and Teachers." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 12, no 2: 131–42.

Li, J. 2001. "Expectations of Chinese Immigrant Parents for Their Children's Education: The Interplay of Chinese Tradition and Canadian Context." *Canadian Journal of Education* 26, no 4: 477–94.

Livas-Dlott, A, B Fuller, G L Stein, M Bridges, A M Figueroa and L Mireles. 2010. "Commands, Competence, and Cariño: Maternal Socialization Practices in Mexican American Families." *Developmental Psychology* 46, no 3: 566–78.

López, G R, J D Scribner and K Mahitivanichcha. 2001. "Redefining Parental Involvement: Lessons from High-Performing Migrant-Impacted Schools." *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no 2: 253–88.

Pels, T V M. 2003. "Educational Strategies of Moroccan Mothers in the Netherlands." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 11, no 2: 63–76.

Rogoff, B. 1990. *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rogoff, B, J Mistry, A Göncü, C Mosier, P Chavajay and S B Heath. 1993. *Guided Participation in Cultural Activity by Toddlers and Caregivers*. Monograph. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 58, no 8: 1–179.

Song, S, and X C Wang. 2006. "Immigrant Parents' Involvement in American Schools: Perspectives from Korean Mothers." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 34, no 2: 125–32.

Super, C M, and S Harkness. 1986. "The Developmental Niche: A Conceptualization at the Interface of Child and Culture." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 9, no 4: 545–69.

Tobin, J, A Arzubiaga and J K Adair. 2013. *Children Crossing Borders: Immigrant Parent and Teacher Perspectives on Preschool*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Vandenbroeck, M, G Roets and A Snoeck. 2009. "Immigrant/ Refugee Mothers Crossing Borders: Nomadic Identities and Multiple Belongings in Early Childhood Education." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 17, no 2: 203–16.

Vygotsky, L S. 1978. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Wood, D, J Bruner and G Ross. 1976. "The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 17, no 2: 89–100. ♟

A Home for Dogs

Julie Jackie

Julie Jackie received her BEd from the University of Alberta and has been teaching Grades 1 and 2 for 11 years. She is currently teaching Grade 1 at the newly opened Roberta MacAdams School, in Edmonton, Alberta. She is particularly interested in using inquiry learning and project work to foster relationships between her students and the community at large.

Background to the Project

Our Homes project took place at Michael A Kostek School, in Edmonton, Alberta, from October 2015 to March 2016. After looking for connections with the curriculum and with our students' interests, it was decided to use *homes* to tie many curricular areas together. To provoke wonder and curiosity in the children, a note was sent to them stating that a package arriving a few days later would be providing clues about what they were going to learn about. The children began wondering what it could be about and started brainstorming ideas. The letter was delivered to the school office and brought to the classroom. Immediately, the children were suspicious about who sent the letter and why it was sent to them. In the days following, packages mysteriously appeared or were delivered, and each contained a home for something—first, a spider's web, followed by an egg, a barn and then a map to go look for the final clue. The children followed the directions on the map, which led them to the home of one of the children, not far from the school. Here, they discovered the package containing the book *A House Is a House for Me,* by Mary Ann Hoberman. We sat on the front step of the child's home and read the story as the children made connections between the items that had been delivered, finally coming to the conclusion that we were going to be learning about homes.

When starting a project, I always find it helpful to build that strong connection between the children and the work they will be doing, which is why I chose to look at their own homes first.

The children spent the first few weeks introducing us to their own homes—telling stories about their favourite parts of their homes, writing about what makes their house feel like home, creating Google maps of where they live to build connections outside of school, studying each home while learning to create observational drawings, and many more topics.

After spending a few weeks capitalizing on all of these connections, I knew that I needed to move into areas of the curriculum that I hoped to address. As much as I try to let the children lead an entire project, there are small pockets of time where I need to help facilitate their curiosity into directions that would bring us to certain opportunities for learning. Sometimes this has been successful. Other times, not so much. This was to be one of those times.

A part of the Grade 2 science curriculum is about small flying and crawling animals, so I thought that by taking a walk in the forest behind our school, we could start looking for places where these bugs and insects were going to attempt to make their homes for the winter. As it turns out, we were about a week too late and our findings weren't as plentiful as I had hoped. I started looking at where we could go with our project next, but then had it clearly pointed out by a small group of students.

It turns out that while they were outside for recess, they noticed a few stray dogs wandering through the schoolyard. Curious about where they came from and who owned them, they came in with questions flying out of them. "Who were their owners?" "Why were they there?" "Who is going to feed them and keep them safe? "What happens if they get hit by a car?" And the one that would be the spark to the flame, "Where were their homes?"

That was it! All this time, I had been wondering how I would choose which direction to go next and, as always, it was time that I listened to the children and followed them. I needed to capitalize on their interest in helping these dogs and their natural curiosity, so I immediately contacted a few organizations in our city who work with stray dogs.

After explaining the kind of expert I was hoping to connect my children with, Second Chance Animal Rescue Society (SCARS) responded that they would love to send in one of their volunteers to speak to my students and answer their questions.

Talking About Homes for Dogs

As with most experts I have contacted as field experts, it is overwhelming to see how quickly they are willing to jump at the opportunity to share the work they do with a group of eager children. Soon after I contacted them, SCARS connected me with Kathy McCartney, one of their volunteers, and we made arrangements for her to come to the school to speak to the children. Before she arrived, we prepared our sketchbooks with questions that the children were wondering about so we could take notes while she spoke. Taking a few moments to write these questions in their sketchbooks would allow them to bring back specific valuable pieces of information that they knew they needed, as well as record other interesting facts or ideas as she spoke.

The children gathered in one of the common spaces in the school and eagerly awaited Kathy's arrival. As Kathy walked around the corner, the students gasped as they noticed that one of her dogs that she adopted through SCARS was with her. Many of the children shrieked excitedly at the sight of the dog, a retriever named Taffy, but for some of the children, this was their first experience with a dog, and they watched nervously as Taffy wagged her tail, echoing the children's feelings of excitement and nervousness.

Throughout the next hour, Kathy spoke with the children about her experiences with SCARS. From telling the stories about how Taffy was rescued from a community where she was living under a burned-out car with her litter of puppies, to how SCARS was started, to how SCARS is a completely volunteer-run organization, the children clung to her every word. They drew pictures and wrote down pieces of important information throughout the presentation and eagerly asked questions.

After saying goodbye to Kathy and Taffy, we returned to our classroom to reflect on what we had learned. It was so clear that the children were moved by the work that SCARS does and felt compelled to help them in any way they could. We brainstormed a list of things that they thought we could do to help them and then I had some time to look at where to go next.

Immediately after looking at their list, the ideas started flowing and I started noticing that there were many possible curriculum connections that could be made. The students most wanted to help SCARS with their Walls for Winter program. This program was created to bring doghouses to communities where there were more stray dogs than available foster homes, so that the dogs would have somewhere warm to spend the winter. I immediately started contacting people who I thought would be interested in helping us take on this endeavour, with fingers crossed that something would come together.

Preparing for the Project

As much as I would love to say that when amazing things are going on in the classroom, all other things can immediately be put on hold, but that is not always the case. We were in the midst of other things and other commitments required attention, so as I tried to find someone to help us build a doghouse, time got away on us.

It had been a couple of weeks, and I knew that we finally had the time that we would need not only to fully dive into the work we were about to undertake but also to give it the attention it deserved. I knew that it had been a while since we last worked on our project, so I wanted to find a way to provoke their minds again and rekindle the fire that was lit under them when they came back from their visit with Kathy. I also knew that it had to be real. I wanted to present them with a situation that would make them feel the same feelings that empowered them to do something to help SCARS and the dogs they rescue. It was time to take a gamble.

I think at times there is a fine line between what is meant for children and what is not. I think that more often than not we underestimate what children are capable of understanding in an effort to protect them from things that may make them feel emotions that are uncomfortable. In all of the conversations that we had been having, the children were struggling to understand why an organization like SCARS is even needed. I had an idea for how I would do it.

The children came into the classroom after lunch one day and waiting for them was a video on the Smart Board. Without a lot of conversation, I hit play and they wondered out loud what it was about, where the voices were and, most of all, why we were watching it. The video I showed them was Zsofia Zsemberi's *Gift*. Joyful music accompanied the images of a man bringing a nervous young girl, carrying a well-loved stuffed animal, home to meet his family. In the next few minutes the students became more

connected with the family as they watched them enjoy each other's company. However, in a few moments, the joyful music was replaced by a slightly more sombre melody and the students saw the family spending less and less time with the little girl. After the little girl gets into some mischief, the man and girl go for a drive; the stuffy is thrown from the car and chased by the young girl. Immediately, the silence of the classroom was replaced with the sounds of children shouting out, questioning what was happening, looking for answers. They watched the man drive away and then look back into his rear-view mirror, seeing a dog sitting on the road in the place of the child. The children spun around, eyes wide, shouting at me "The girl was the dog!" quickly followed by "This whole time, *she* was the dog!"

After giving them a few minutes to process, we started to discuss how they were feeling and what it meant. The range of feelings was really so much more than I had anticipated. From sadness to anger, everyone felt something. They spoke of how their hearts felt what the dog felt and how angry they were at the man for leaving the dog behind. Most important, they spoke about how they hated and loved the video at the same time. I reminded them that the feelings they were feeling were the most powerful of all because they were the feelings that will bring about change. They were the feelings that will stay with them forever and that they will share with anyone who will listen. Those feelings will affect others in similar ways and, hopefully, if everyone understands that they must take care of their pets, there will no longer be a need for organizations like SCARS. Then finally, the connection to what we had learned about SCARS— SCARS has to exist because some people choose to abandon their dogs. Now it was up to them to teach people that it is so important for people to take care of the dogs they own.

Almost immediately, the students began coming up with ways that they could share what they were feeling from the video and connect it with what they had learned from SCARS. Over the next few weeks, our classroom was filled with the sights and sounds of children working together to share their learning. They worked together to write scripts for plays that they would later create, making posters to show their learning and creating slideshows to share facts and ideas. The learning that was taking place during these representations was constantly evolving. The children negotiated directions for the project, problem solved and compromised when disagreements arose, found ways to share leadership and, piece by piece, made their ideas and understandings visible to others.

The Potential Power of the Parent Community

While this was going on, in the background, I was frantically trying to find someone who was willing to take on the task of helping the students construct a doghouse. After many attempts and many interested but politely declining e-mails, I reached out to the families in my classroom. I posted that I was interested in constructing a doghouse with the class to donate to SCARS for their Walls for Winter program and was wondering if they (or anyone they knew) would be interested in helping us.

Over the weekend, I was amazed at what took place. All of a sudden, in a matter of hours, it was taking shape! I was included on a variety of e-mails and before I knew it, the materials had been donated, a parent was willing to cut the pieces to size and some students in the Construction Engineering Technology (CET) program at NAIT were willing to actually help us put it together. All they needed from me was a plan. I was in complete shock. I had never seen something like this come together so quickly and I could not wait to share the news with the students.

Logistics

On Monday morning, I excitedly shared the developments that happened over the weekend, and the children's excitement was difficult to contain. Of course, they were ready to start building the doghouse immediately, so I explained that we needed to work out some logistics before we could start. First of all, we needed a plan to send to our volunteers. The children shared stories about their parents being able to do it (because they had built a doghouse at home before); the ever-popular "Just Google it!" came up; and then one of the students suggested that we e-mail Kathy and see if SCARS had a plan because "maybe they want the dog house to look a certain way." The children agreed that e-mailing SCARS would be a good idea because we were trying to help them, not make more work for them. Within a few days, SCARS had responded and sent us a plan, which we forwarded to our volunteers.

Once we had the plans, we spent time studying the plans and learning as much as we possibly could from them. We learned about different points of view, studied the drawings, discussed why they were drawn the way they were and, most important, used them to figure out whether or not the doghouse would fit through the doors of the school. The children decided that in order to know for sure that it would fit, they wanted to build a full-scale model
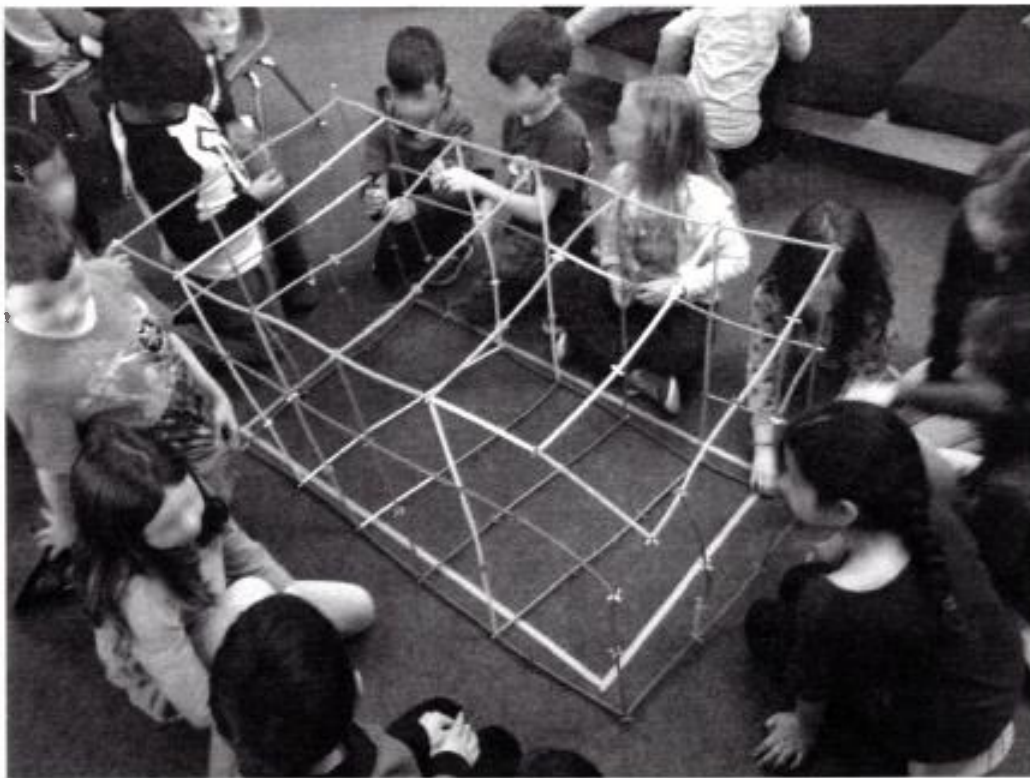
so that we could try it. Since the measurements in the plan needed to be converted to metric, we started having conversations about what *feet* meant in the measurement. They quickly decided that if they measured their own feet, they would be able to know how big to make it. Each student traced their own foot and attempted to figure out how long it would be, and then we compared them. As we shared, they noticed that they were all very different so they must have missed something. They decided that maybe it wasn't their own feet that were used, so I went on to help them convert the measurements into centimetres and metres. To build the model, we used straws and connectors; all 29 children took turns adding pieces, fixing pieces that popped open, hot gluing the connections together (as we eventually decided that it was the only way to make sure it stayed together) and checking measurements. After it was complete, we took it for a walk through the school and were thankful to discover that it *would* fit through all of the doorways.

While all of this was going on, I was working out the logistics of the execution of the project. I learned a lot during this process, and it reminded me to look at the work we were trying to tackle from different perspectives. I saw the possibilities when I looked at the project and, at times, when other people looked at the restrictions. This experience reminded me that at times it is my job to challenge what people believe children are capable of, and at other times it is my turn to stand back, hear the concerns they are voicing and work with them. Even though I knew that my students were completely capable of going to NAIT and being present for the pieces to be cut to size (and potentially helping to do it) and being directly involved in the hands-on construction of the dog house, I knew that there were many learning possibilities that would present themselves in this process, and I needed to stand back. I learned that while the students wouldn't be able to go to the construction shop to cut the pieces with real tools and they wouldn't actually join the pieces together with their own hands, they would gain experiences and knowledge that they would carry with them forever, and that was the most important part.

The plan was set! One parent would get the materials and put them together according to the plan set by SCARS, and the NAIT CET students would come to help assemble the doghouse when it was time. I was able to persuade the CET students to leave out the planned insulation so that we could insulate it with the material that we found to be the best insulator after conducting our experiments in class.

In between the blocks of time when the students were working on their representations, we looked further into the different aspects of our doghouse. The students came up with experiments to test

which materials would be the best to keep the dogs warm and revised their experiments when they discovered that they were testing many materials at once and couldn't tell which material was actually helping to keep the temperature as close to the indoor temperature as possible. After many attempts, they discovered that Styrofoam would be the best insulator to keep the dogs warm for the winter and were very excited to put it in the walls of the doghouse.

Sometimes, there are unexpected turns in our journey that bring us to learning that we hadn't even considered before. One of these turns occurred when the children began debating whether or not the size of the doghouse had something to do with how warm it stayed inside. It was so interesting to see the children respectfully debate their beliefs and positions and, at the same time, try to understand their thinking behind their reasons.

The Build

The excitement as the children arrived in the classroom on the morning of the build really was unbelievable! They could not wait for our guests to come to help us put the house together, but they waited as patiently as they could for the NAIT students to arrive. Finally, it was time to build!

Since the pieces had been assembled into panels, the actual construction of the doghouse went quite quickly. As the NAIT students put the pieces together, the children asked their questions and the NAIT students tried to answer them in as much detail as possible. At the same time, they took every opportunity to teach them about the different steps. They explained what it is like to be going to school at NAIT and what their plans were for after they were done school. When the time came to put on the walls, the Styrofoam insulation was inserted to keep the dogs that would later live in the doghouse warm for the winter. To add finishing touches on the doghouse, the children painted the house and added their handprints so that they would send a little piece of themselves with the doghouse when it went to its community.

Celebrating Our Learning

The time had finally come to share all of the amazing things that the children had learned throughout the experience with their doghouse, so we started planning our project celebration. We brainstormed all of the things that we thought were important to be celebrated, and it was really overwhelming when I stood back and looked at everything that we had learned throughout the process. In the end, we had 17 different pieces of learning to share with our invited guests—other students and teachers in the school, parents, Kathy McCartney and a few other volunteers from SCARS, and our school board trustee and assistant
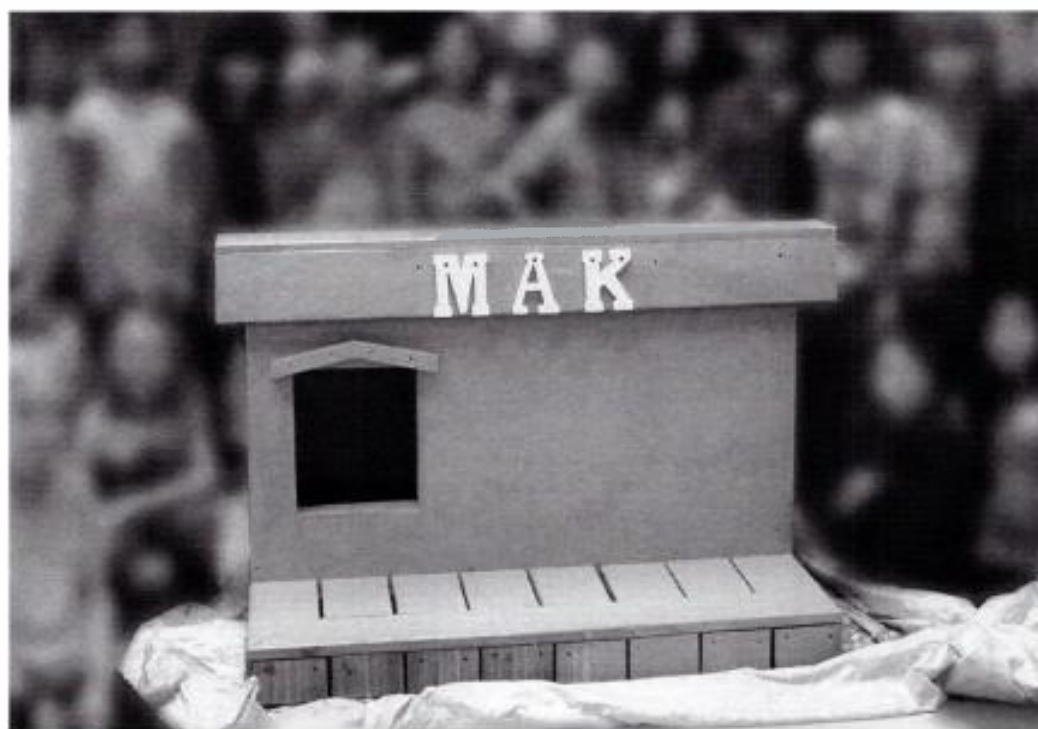
to the superintendent. Our classroom was transformed into a museum, where each student had a job of telling people about a part of the learning that took place. As they sat at their tables, waiting for the first guests to arrive, all of a sudden they got very nervous. They began questioning themselves and what they had learned, and worried that they wouldn't be able to answer the questions that would be asked of them. I reminded them that this was *their* project and *their* learning and they knew everything they would need to know. All they had to do was trust that they had the ability to share what they knew and our guests would be amazed with the work they had done. It was one of those moments where it was like the baby birds who were ready to fly and needed the gentle push out of the nest.

As the door opened and the guests started arriving, our little birds felt the gentle push and they flew! In an instant, their fears were replaced with confidence and they excitedly shared what they had been working on with anyone who would come talk to them. They smiled as parents and guests wrote comments in their comment books, and every now and then looked to me for reassurance that I was proud of the work they had done. Of course, there was no question. I had never been more proud of them.

References

Gift. 2015. Directed by Zsófia Zsemberi. Budapest: Zsemberi Film. Available at https://vimeo.com/125014015 (accessed November 17, 2016).

Hoberman, M A. 2007. *A House Is a House for Me*. New York: Puffin. Orig pub 1978. 🎎

Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Development: A Resource Guide for Practioners

Lindsay Herriot

I am pleased and privileged to introduce the early childhood education artifacts catalogue *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Development: A Resource Guide for Practioners*. The artifacts assembled in this catalogue were a weekly component of a pilot undergraduate/graduate course named "Contemporary Issues in Childhood," which I recently taught at the University of Alberta. Students were tasked with translating many of the provocative and perennial issues of childhood theory, such as children's rights, racial and gendered subjectivities, and childhood innocence, to name a few, into concrete materials for ECE practitioners and researchers alike. They were challenged to distill many of the complex and controversial "big ideas" of the field into a single item—such as a toy, a blog post or piece of media—to provide a tangible point of contact with what are often nebulous concepts.

Materials could be those meant for classroom use with young children, professional development resources, or supplies for parents or caregivers. These materials provide both practitioners and researchers with unique windows into each other's worlds. Practitioners are provided with an abundance of materials that were drawn from theory and research with which to stimulate their own practice, and researchers can gain insight into how their work can be introduced, contested or otherwise taken up in ECE settings.

The five graduate students in the course were given the added responsibility of curating the wealth of student-selected artifacts into a cohesive, user-friendly catalogue under the following six sections:

- Theme 1: What Do We Mean by Childhood?
- Theme 2: Children's Rights and Citizenship
- Theme 3: Play, Work and Family Life
- Theme 4: Ethnocultural Considerations
- Theme 5: Discourses of "Innocence": Gender and Sexuality
- Theme 6: Global Considerations

In the catalogue, students have specifically linked how each artifact allows a "big idea" to be engaged with. It is my hope that all audiences find meaning, new ideas, and of course new questions in its pages.

The catalogue will be available on the ECEC website, www.ecec-ata.com. ♟

Best Practices in Writing Instruction

Edited by S Graham, C A MacArthur and J Fitzgerald. 2013. 2nd edition. New York: Guilford.

Miriam Ramzy

"[Writing is] one of the most difficult areas of teaching and learning because of its complexity."

(Troia 2013, 405)

Miriam Ramzy is a PhD student at the University of Calgary. She is in the Language and Literacy program, looking at ways to improve the writing abilities of young children. Miriam taught grades K–3 for six years. During that time, she completed her master's degree at NYU, focusing on early literacy practices to help struggling readers and writers. She is passionate about teaching writing and is striving to improve the writing of young children.

The data published on Alberta's provincial achievement tests (PAT) results furthers the postulation above. In Alberta, Canada, our Grade 3 PAT results from 2009 through 2013 show a profound lack of achievement in the standard of excellence in writing (14 per cent) compared to excellence in reading (40 per cent) (Alberta Education 2013). Improving the writing instruction that students receive by including effective, data-driven strategies in our practices is fundamental in developing stronger, more competent and self-motivated writers.

Three people edited *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*, a 444-page book. The first is Steve Graham, who focuses his research on writing development and writing difficulties. In editing this book, Graham worked with two others who mirror his interest and focus in writing: Charles A MacArthur and Jill Fitzgerald. The chapters in this book are authored by various experts seeking to help teachers improve their writing instruction and better reach the needs of all of their learners, from kindergarten through Grade 12, by describing research-supported and evidence-based writing practices.

The book consists of four parts, each with a distinct focus. The individual parts are then divided into a number of chapters. The authors make evident the age and grade focus in each chapter, allowing the reader to decide the relevance to his or her own practice and interests. Additionally, each chapter addresses the [American] Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in writing, and examines how to use and incorporate the CCSS in developing a writing program.

Part one begins with general yet essential information about why writing is important. The authors discuss and explain ways to develop an effective program. Basic information on the writing continuum—as children progress through school—is discussed, followed by examples of effective tools for teaching writing.

Following a brief introduction, the chapters in part two deliver an extensive amount of information regarding the three main genres of writing highlighted in the CCSS (narrative, argumentative and informative). Every chapter takes an in-depth look at one genre, followed by specific applications of certain research-based strategies to support students' writing development.

Part three delves deeper into the writing process, with each chapter covering one specific strategy that educators need to explicitly teach to ensure that students experience success. These include planning, revising, sentence construction, handwriting, spelling and effectively using technology to support continued growth in writing.

There is also information for teachers about how to effectively motivate and assess students.

The book ends with two chapters about special populations: working with English learners (ELs) and using a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach for struggling students. Part four begins by identifying and explaining many of the constraints on ELs when they are learning to write in English, and then offers some specific strategies to help ELs deal with the demanding constraints they face. Although brief, this chapter does offer many culturally sensitive and responsive instructional practices that teachers can implement in their classrooms. The last chapter explicitly explains how to use an RtI approach in a classroom to support struggling students, and uses case studies to demonstrate its effectiveness.

This book is very well written, and offers a plethora of suggestions for teachers. It flows smoothly, and the content is expressed clearly and sequentially. The most critical elements for any writing program, from kindergarten through Grade 12, are detailed in this book and are presented in an easy-to-understand format. The large body of research, blended with instructional implications and practices, makes this book a bridge between teachers and researchers in the field of writing instruction.

However, the strong focus on the CCSS presented throughout makes the book somewhat less relevant from a Canadian perspective. Furthermore, the audience for this book ranges from preschool teachers to high school teachers. As the audience is so large, the focus on strategies, case studies and program information is too broad to be detailed and helpful enough for any specific grade. Additionally, for early elementary teachers, this book provides only a surface-level look at some of the components necessary for a strong writing program.

Nonetheless, *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* is a valuable resource for multiple audiences. I would highly recommend this book to administrators whose responsibilities include leading and supporting teachers. University instructors will find it a valuable resource for undergraduate courses. Teachers who want to begin to develop their understanding of writing instruction will also find this book a useful tool. This book will help one understand the necessary best practices for teaching writing in any classroom and in any discipline. It is comprehensive and covers an abundance of practices that must be in place in an effective writing instruction program. It is a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the complexities of the writing process: "one of the most difficult academic tasks for students" (Coker 2013, 26).

References

Alberta Education. 2013. *Multi Year Report, Provincial Results: 2009-2013*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education.

Coker, D L. 2013. "Writing Instruction in Preschool and Kindergarten." In *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*, 2nd ed, ed S Graham, C A MacArthur and J Fitzgerald, 26–47. New York: Guilford.

Troia, G A. 2013. "Writing Instruction Within a Response-to-Intervention Framework." In *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*, 2nd ed, ed S Graham, C A MacArthur and J Fitzgerald, 403–27. New York: Guilford. ♟

Guidelines for Contributors

Early Childhood Education is published to

- promote the professional development of educators in improving practice in early childhood education and
- stimulate thinking, explore new ideas and offer various points of view.

Articles from all educators and educational researchers are welcome. Classroom teachers especially are invited to consider writing about topics that interest them. Submissions are requested that will stimulate personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Teachers appreciate articles that present differing perspectives; innovative classroom and school practices; recent literature reviews; trends and issues; research findings; descriptions, reviews or evaluations of instructional and curricular methods, programs or materials; and child-related humour.

Please submit manuscripts by e-mail as a double-spaced Word document. A cover page should include the contributor's name, professional position, degree(s) held, address, phone number(s), and e-mail address. To ensure blind review, use only the article title in headers within the manuscript.

Manuscripts may be up to 3,500 words. References to literature made in the text of the submission must appear in full in a list at the end of the article. Literature not cited in the text but providing background material or for further reading should be similarly listed.

Photographs, line drawings, diagrams and poetry are welcome. To ensure quality reproduction, photographs should be clear and have good contrast. Drawings should be originals. A caption and photo credit should accompany each photograph. The contributor is responsible for obtaining releases for use of photographs. Contributors whose manuscripts are used will receive two copies of the issue containing the published article.

Following the review process and acceptance of an article for publication, authors will be asked to submit the article by e-mail, along with a short biographical sketch of the author(s).

Early Childhood Education is a refereed journal published annually. Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis. Although contributions are reviewed by an editorial review committee, the editor reserves the right to edit for clarity and space.

Manuscripts and photographs, accompanied by the Copyright Transfer Agreement, may be sent to

Cynthia Prasow, MEd
Director of Partner Research Schools
Undergraduate Programs in Education
Werklund School of Education
1340 Education Tower, University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary AB T2N 1N4
cprasow@ucalgary.ca

Permission for Use of Photographs or Student Work

The Alberta Teachers' Association requests the permission of parents/guardians for the reproduction of photographs depicting their children and/or the reproduction of work assignments completed by their children. The photograph/work will be reproduced in *Early Childhood Education,* the journal of the Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association, and is intended for teacher professional development.

Name of student _____

I, _____ **(printed name of parent/guardian of student), agree to the use of this photograph/work for the purpose stated above.**

Signature _____

Relationship to student _____

Address _____

_____ **Postal code**_____

We have recently begun posting Early Childhood Education issues on the ECEC website (www.ecec-ata.com). Are you willing to have your child's written work posted on the Internet as well?

❑ Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the ECEC website.

❑ Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the ECEC website, using a first name only.

❑ No, I do not want my child's written work posted on the ECEC website.

Please send forms to

Supervising Editor, Publications
The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street NW
Edmonton T5N 2R1
Phone 780-447-9491
sandra.bit@ata.ab.ca

The Alberta Teachers' Association

Editorial Review Committee

The Early Childhood Education Council
of the Alberta Teachers' Association

A specialist council for ECS and
Grades 1, 2 and 3 teachers

Joining the Early Childhood Education Council will permit you to
- belong to a professional organization that is interested in your work and area of specialization;
- participate in a provincial ATA organization concerned with educational issues relating to teachers of young children;
- contribute your opinion on matters concerning early childhood education;
- meet other professionals interested in and involved with early childhood education;
- participate in activities sponsored by the ECEC regional for your area;
- attend the annual Early Childhood Education Council conference to glean new and exciting ideas and to share your concerns with colleagues;
- receive *Issues, Events & Ideas,* a newsletter published several times a year, featuring council news and ideas for classroom use; and
- read *Early Childhood Education,* a journal published once a year, to keep informed of current early childhood research and writings.

Early Childhood Education Council, ATA

Membership (ECS–3) Application Form

A. Name _____

   Address _____ Postal Code _____

   Alberta Teacher Certificate No _____

   Local Name and Number _____

B. Category of membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association (check one)

   ❏ Active   ❏ Associate   ❏ Student   ❏ Life   ❏ Honorary

   ❏ I am not presently a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association

C. Membership fee enclosed (check one)

   ❏ Regular $25 (1 yr)   ❏ $45 (2 yr)   ❏ $65 (3 yr)

   ❏ Student $11   ❏ Affiliate $27   ❏ Subscription $30

Please enclose cheque or money order payable to the **Alberta Teachers' Association** and mail to

The Alberta Teachers' Association, Barnett House
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1

Council Notes

Constitutional Objective

The objective of the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association is to improve practice in early childhood education by increasing members' knowledge and understanding of this specialty.

Executive

President
Danielle Kowalchyk, Sherwood Park

Past President
Joy de Nance, Calgary

President-Elect
Vacant

Secretary
Jennifer Bridle, Calgary

Treasurer
Karin Giszas-Rivard, Calgary

Conference Director
Janice Comrie, Edmonton

PD Chair
Elan LaMontagne, Calgary

Journal Coeditors
Cynthia Prasow, Calgary
Miwa Takeuchi, Calgary

Newsletter Coeditors
Lisa Schoeler, Calgary
Kimberlee Wrathall, Calgary

Alberta Education Liaison
Karen Sliwkanich, Fort Saskatchewan

University of Alberta Liaison
Larry Prochner, Edmonton

University of Calgary Liaison
Cynthia Prasow, Calgary

University of Lethbridge Liaison
Pamela Winsor, Lethbridge

PEC Liaison
Markiana Cyncar-Hryschuk, Edmonton

ATA Staff Advisor
Shelley Magnusson, Edmonton

Web Manager
Sarjenka Kuryliw, Vilna

Associate Web Manager
Vacant

REGIONAL PRESIDENTS
Calgary and District
Katarina Rivard

Central West
Sandra Summers, Red Deer

Edmonton
Michelle Bezubiak, Edmonton

Fort McMurray
Lana Pelletier, Fort McMurray

North East
Carrie Fox, Two Hills

South East
Jennifer Deruyter, Medicine Hat

South Peace
April Brown, Grande Prairie

South West
Debra Watson, Lethbridge

University of Alberta
Jocelyn Finn, Edmonton

University of Calgary
Katarina Rivard, Calgary

Membership

Total membership of the council is currently 2,650.

Conference and Other Programs

The council organizes an annual conference for its members on early childhood education. Attendance at annual meetings over the last several years has averaged 600. For information on the 2017 conference, contact Janice Comrie, janicecomrie@shaw.ca.

Several regional organizations of the council carry on programs for members in their areas. The council supports these regionals. It also occasionally offers workshops and other activities in areas where regionals have not been organized.

Publications

The Early Childhood Education Council publishes a newsletter, *Issues, Events & Ideas,* and a journal, *Early Childhood Education.* Members of the council receive these publications as part of their membership. Nonmembers wishing to receive copies of these publications may obtain them by paying the subscription rate of $30 (Canadian funds) annually and writing to the Early Childhood Education Council, ATA, Barnett House, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1.

Website

The council maintains an Internet site at www.ecec-ata.com.