



Issues, Events & Ideas

Early Childhood Education Council  of The Alberta Teachers' Association

No 142 May 2017

President's Message

What a great start to the year for early childhood education in Alberta! We have been hearing some exciting things from many regionals. You all do so many amazing things for children and make the smallest or most complex concepts come alive in your classrooms. Examples of this can be found in school newsletters, curriculum focus group conversations, the *ATA News* and even mainstream media. Although you may not initially see the benefits students receive from your efforts, trust that their future teachers will be thankful for the students' sense of wonder, drive for knowledge and passion for learning that you have created!

ECEC's 50th anniversary celebration at the November annual conference was a huge success. With more attendees than ever and positive responses in their feedback forms, the Edmonton conference committee is to be commended! Several inspirational teachers in

Alberta have been posting on social media many of the great ideas they have been implementing and some of the new books and resources they have been using, and I am excited to try them! Please continue to share, and help us build a collaborative community of learners.

As we surpassed 100 days of school and the mark of half the school year, students are just beginning to hit their strides in learning for their grade levels. Remember to take these signs of success and slow down to celebrate knowing that you were a part of the students' journeys. It's only when we pause and turn back to reflect for a moment that we recognize how far we have gone, how successful our journeys have been and how skilled we early childhood educators are!

Best wishes from the ECEC executive and the committees.

Danielle Kowalchyk

Mission Statement: To improve the practice of teaching young children by increasing member knowledge and understanding of this specialty. The ECEC acts on behalf of young children and their teachers to promote excellence in education.

Visit our website at www.ecec-ata.com.

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2016 Conference Highlights

50th Anniversary

To celebrate the Early Childhood Education Council's (ECEC) 50th anniversary, many members attended a golden celebration! Several educators who have been part of ECEC throughout its history were able to make the trip to Edmonton to be part of the celebration. One past member, Myrna Fox, was part of the original council 50 years ago!



ECEC executive members past and present.

Phil McRae—The Internet of Me: Neglect in an Age of Hyper-Connectivity



Phil McRae

Phil McRae, executive staff officer with the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), gave an impassioned keynote address about the loss of connection we experience as we become increasingly connected. Although our homes,

classrooms and the world in general are becoming deeply interconnected digitally, we are losing personal, human connections to people, nature and even ourselves. Although he didn't suggest that the remedy to this lack of connection is to unplug totally, he did offer some suggestions to mitigate the challenges of living in this new landscape.

First, find a balance between digital and real-world connections. Find and create time to connect face to face with others and with nature. McRae noted that while technology can steal time, nature can amplify it. He stressed

the importance of offering learners the time to be outside, connecting with each other and their environment. Teachers can take so many lessons outside, slow down and let young learners experience their world, not just learn about it from a screen.

Second, he recommended that we stay mindful to the nature of early childhood development. What do our youngest learners need to grow and learn? They need real-world sensory experiences. They need human connection. They need time to talk, play and explore. They don't need hours of time spent with a device.

Third, he spoke of the simple need for each of us to be present and tuned in to the people around us, not to devices. He provided some interesting figures: in 2007 for the first time more devices were connected to the Internet than there were people on the planet, and by the year 2020 an estimated 50 billion things (from phones to refrigerators) will be connected. In this rapidly changing world McRae cautioned us to be mindful and aware of our human connections, so we are not alone together.

The most significant and eye-opening illustration that McRae made was on the topic of play. When you Google the word *play*, and look at the image results, the screen fills with play buttons—the classic sideways triangle—or

the play app store logo. There are no images of children at play. Has our definition of play become so digitized that playing outside or playing with friends will no longer be the first thing that comes to mind when we hear the word play? Visit McRae's website at <http://philmcrae.com/index.html>.

Jean Clinton



Jean Clinton

Jean Clinton, a child psychiatrist and knowledge translator, gave a heartfelt keynote address that was both inspiring and backed by the latest brain research. We educators don't need to create connections and relationships with students simply

because it feels good but because it will help students learn. If we don't first develop a sense of well-being in our classrooms, then students who are stressed will not be able to learn and thrive. She noted that kids do well if they can, not if they want to. We educators need to create the conditions that will allow them to do the best they can. We can't expect children to simply come to school, in kindergarten or any grade, ready to learn. We have to create the environment that is ready for students, greet them as they are and be ready for them. We must get to know them, connect with them and modify the learning environment and tasks so that they can find success, be it academic or social.

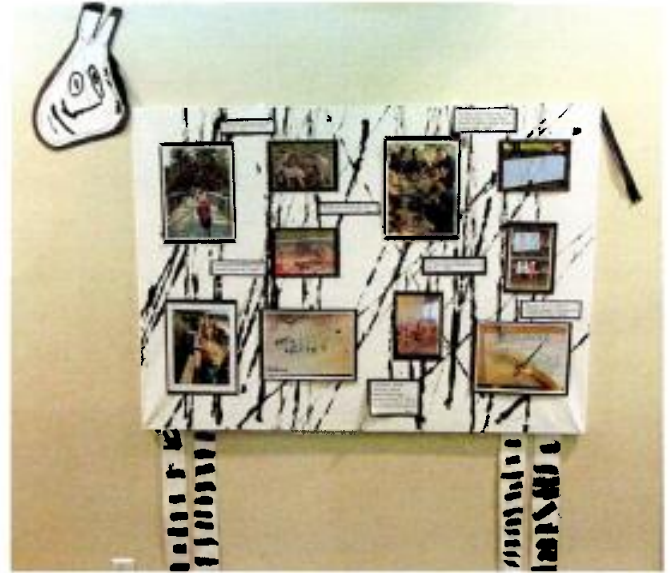
Clinton stressed the importance of addressing social and emotional development in the early years. If students in kindergarten and Grade 1 first learn to be creative thinkers through inquiry, play-based exploration and collaboration, they will develop confidence and many other skills that will set them up for later success. She also noted that the ability to share and practise empathy at an early age was a better predictor than IQ scores of later success.

Delegates left this keynote with increased knowledge of neuroscience and how learning can happen in the brain. And equally important, that learning doesn't happen when kids aren't ready for it, are feeling unsafe or insecure and don't feel a connection to the adult who is trying to teach them. She inspired each of us to make sure we tried to establish that connection with each student, particularly those who may be lacking confidence or who may frequently misbehave. Clinton emphasized that misbehaviour is, more often than not, stress behaviour, and that it is up to us as educators to help reduce that stress through building relationships so students are free to move on to learning. Check out Jean Clinton's website at <http://drjeanclinton.com>.

Edmonton Valley Zoo

What an incredibly inspirational adventure this was, from the moment we stepped off the bus to all of the points along the way. To see the passion, learning and joy of the Edmonton Valley Zoo staff members and the teachers at the school was truly energizing.

It was clear to see early on that the children had been immersed in all areas of the environment, were included in enrichment projects for the animals and truly believed in the power of learning that they gained from the interactions with the animals and zoo staff. Artwork, big questions and their process filled the zoo's hallways. To wander around with the guides and discuss how they are involved brought a true sense of belonging and respect for both the animals and students learning in this very unique setting. Listening to their teacher speak about the thoughtful questions that they are asking and the documentation on the walls of their classroom painted such an amazing picture for all of us who had the pleasure of attending. As the day came to a close it was so hard to get on the bus and not want to explore more. This was a wonderful opportunity that all teachers should experience at least once.



Todd Parr

Todd Parr

Todd Parr's journey began later in life but was greatly influenced by the love of reading and learning that he had as a child. His grandmother was his most significant adult. She instilled

this passion by engaging him in rich literature and building excitement about reading. Parr stated how "children need to feel as though they are involved in the process; they need to be able to relate."

Parr spoke about his process of becoming an author, and although one of his teachers discouraged him early on, he eventually found his passion again through encouragement from his friends and a belief in himself. Initially, his success began with his drawings being used on T-shirts and then sold around the world with much of the proceeds going to charities. He realized early in this process that he could make a difference. With much persistence from those around him, he eventually wrote his first book with huge success and now has over 50 books written

and one on the way in late 2017 called *Love the World*. His love for early childhood educators and children around the world is very evident.

More important, he speaks from a place of genuine love and joy in his books, using highly coloured illustrations and passion to instill his messages of hope to others. Parr is an inspiration to us all in how following your dreams can be hard, but the results can be amazing if you are just willing to **BE WHO YOU ARE!** Check out Parr's website at www.toddparr.com.



ECEC Award Winners

2016 Advocate for Young Children Award



Pamela Winsor (left)
and Deb Watson (right).

In 1970, Pamela Winsor began her teaching career in New Brunswick as a Grade 1 teacher. Later she taught children in in-patient care at the hospital in Halifax and worked as a reading specialist for schools in the Halifax County.

Upon moving to Calgary, Winsor took the position of education consultant for school-age and preschool developmental clinics at the Alberta Children's Hospital and later taught Grade 2 for the Calgary Board of Education.

Furthering her studies, she went to graduate school at the University of Illinois where she studied under the well-respected and world-renowned literacy researcher, David Pearson. In 1990, she arrived at the University of Lethbridge to begin her work with the Faculty of Education. For the past 26 years she has emphasized the role of language and literacy in preservice education.

Winsor taught many of the language and literacy courses in the faculty, focusing primarily on early childhood and elementary

education. She taught graduate courses and supervised graduate student projects and theses concerning many aspects of literacy development, instruction and assessment.

Winsor fulfilled an administrative position in the faculty, and developed many curriculum materials including the document *A Guide to the Development of Professional Portfolios*. In addition, she conceived a variety of literacy assignments and events; she undertook considerable writing and reviewing editorial duties with the International Literacy Association and the Early Childhood Education Council.

Winsor was instrumental in creating, organizing and implementing the faculty's annual literature fair, a 13-year initiative that helped student teachers connect children and young adults with literature in meaningful ways. She ensured that the highest calibre of speakers addressed the U of L students each year, including Kathy Kacer, William Bell and

for the 10th anniversary of the fair, famed writer and illustrator, Michael Kusugak.

Winsor's enthusiasm and passion for making global children's literature a part of young children's literacy experiences were evident in every course she taught. They also resulted in the incredible global literature library, compiled with Beth Cormier, which is housed in the curriculum lab for the benefit of student teachers for years to come. Her knowledge of literature extended to creating an extensive library of children's and young adult novels for use in language and literacy courses, exposing university students to exemplary authors and titles so they could share effective reading practices with their students in classrooms.

Winsor's publications continue to be important resources in literacy education in Canada and beyond. Her own, *The Language Experience Approach to Literacy for Children Learning English*, was published in 2009 by Portage & Main, and a highly respected coauthored textbook on teaching English language arts, *Language and Literacy: Content and Teaching Strategies*, now in its 7th edition, was published by Pearson Education. Numerous articles concerning beginning reading and children's literature have also been published in journals such as the *Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Teacher Education* and *Alberta Voices*. Winsor also contributed to the ECEC Bookshelf columns in the newsletter.

Winsor's work included extensive international literacy work in Eastern Europe, Central America and Africa. She is currently a volunteer consultant to Reading Kenya, a teacher education project sponsored by Canadian Organization for Development Through Education (CODE) that focuses on helping teachers increase their capacity to offer effective early literacy instruction. Kenyan teachers have given her the Masai name, Naisola, meaning the best. In the past she has participated in educational development projects in Belize, South Africa, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

The highlight of Winsor's career was working many years with teachers of primary grades in Belize. As a volunteer for

the International Literacy Association, she led a project called Language to Literacy in Belize, a program that supplied children's literature and taught teachers how to teach effectively with it.

The Early Childhood Education Council is delighted to recognize Pamela Winsor with the 2016 Advocate for Young Children Award.

ECEC Award



Debbie Bailey (left) and Cynthia Prasow (right).

Debbie Bailey began her teaching career with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), and her work has focused deeply on early childhood education (ECE), particularly working in kindergarten. One of Bailey's many strengths has been her ability to focus on current issues in early childhood. Her thoughtful approach to teaching and learning often resulted in posing questions about approaches to teaching. She has been a strong advocate for appropriate play-based programs with a strong literacy focus.

Bailey was very much ahead of her time in her teaching career as she began to research the impact of technology on kindergarten students. She published and presented a number of papers on this issue; an issue that still continues to be an important topic in ECE.

Similarly Bailey has been a champion of play in early childhood and has developed

and presented many times on this topic to ensure educators, parents and administrators understand the importance of play and how it should translate to appropriate practice in the classroom.

For several years Bailey worked as a sessional instructor at the University of Calgary, teaching in the early childhood program and supervising student teachers in schools.

Bailey then returned to teach in schools and soon held administrative roles in K-3 schools, continuing to strengthen the practice of working with young children in schools. She focused on the importance of literacy development of young children ensuring all ECE children were provided a solid foundation in language development.

Over the years Bailey has served on a number of committees including the Early Learning Committee and Alberta Education's Primary Programs Advisory Committee, and she held a number of positions on ECEC including cochairing the annual conference.

In the many years that Bailey served as kindergarten specialist with the Calgary Board of Education, she continually advocated for early childhood education ensuring that the CBE and related agencies were aware of the importance of ECE, new research and books to support her work.

She ensured professional learning opportunities for teachers, and supported the development of the Early Development Centre preschool programs. She worked as part of a team to open the CBE new preschool-to-Grade 3 Aboriginal Learning Centre.

Bailey has never been shy about stating her concerns about practices that she may have felt contravened appropriate practice, and she remains steadfast in her belief of what constitutes excellent teaching practices in classrooms for early learning.

Bailey is highly deserving of this award for her outstanding work and commitment to early childhood education in Alberta. It gives me the greatest pleasure representing ECEC but also as a special and long-time friend, to present this award. Congratulations!

ECEC Awards

- **The Advocate for Young Children Award** recognizes the contributions of a council member or nonmember who has shown to be an advocate for young children on a provincial and regional level.
- **The ECEC Award** is presented to a member who has contributed to the field of early childhood education by exemplifying the philosophy of the council and who has taken action to promote this philosophy.
- **The Recognition of Service Award** recognizes the contributions made by members at the provincial and regional levels.

These awards can be presented annually at the fall conference but not necessarily every year. Send nominations to Past President Joy de Nance at jdenance@cbe.ca.



ECEC Grant

The ECEC Grant of up to \$1,000 is awarded to an Alberta teacher to assist in research or innovative classroom programming in early childhood education. Applicants must be members of ECEC. Send application letters to Past President Joy de Nance at jdenance@cbe.ca. Deadline for applications must be received by May 1 of each year.

For more information, go to www.ecec-ata.com.

Council News

Call for Nominations to ECEC Executive

In May, there will be a call for interest for the position of communications director. An election for the position will be held at the annual general meeting (AGM) in November in Banff. The communications director position is a two-year term elected biannually. The position involves managing all multimedia accounts, CASL portfolios and membership specifics as well as overseeing the newsletter, journal and website. The communications director reports to the table officers regularly, must attend all table officers meetings, executive meetings and AGMs, and submits written reports on the various communication activities at these meetings and to table officers.

Members will be e-mailed in the spring, and a nomination form will be posted on ECEC's website at www.ecec-ata.com in May. Nominations must be in by August 31. Please watch your e-mail, the website and our Facebook page for more information this spring.

New Grants

Two new grants are available for members:

- **Regional grants:** Each regional has grant money to award to members to assist in the costs of attending ECEC events within their region or throughout the province.
- **Conference grants:** Grants are available to students and regular ECEC members to cover conference expenses.

Please go to the ECEC website at www.ecec-ata.com for further information.



Sparking Creativity

**Come spark your creativity at the castle
in the Rockies!**

November 2nd, 3rd & 4th 2017
Banff, Alberta
<http://www.ecec-ata.com/>

Looking at Inclusion Using a Different Perspective

It's library time in my Grade 1 classroom and I observe a group of seven students pulling the beanbag chairs in front of a child-sized couch. Some students are sitting on the couch while others are gathered on the chairs. One child, seated on the couch, is holding up a book (teacher style) while another is sitting on a chair flailing his arms and making noises. Other students are helping the flailing child by giving him words to say. I observe for a while and then walk over and ask what they are doing. "We're playing Interactions," they inform me. Initially this seemed a rather strange response, but then it begins to make sense to me.

My Grade 1 students have been participating in something that we like to call reverse integration with one of the Division I Interactions classes in my school. An Interactions class is a classroom developed to support the learning needs of students with autism. There are eight students in the class with one teacher and two educational assistants (EAs). For the last few years the Interactions teacher and I have been working very closely to build relationships between her students with autism and my "regular" Grade 1 students. The primary way that we have been doing this is to have small groups (six to eight) of my Grade 1 students visit the Interactions classroom to read their home-reading books. This reading takes place at the same time as the other students are doing EEKK (elbow to elbow, knee to knee) reading of their own home-reading books in the classroom. Each group of students visits the Interactions classroom about once a week and the grouping of the visiting children remains the same each time.

Typically inclusion occurs when students in specialized classrooms spend time with their peers in a regular classroom, but this model may not be the best one for many school-aged students with autism. The term *reverse inclusion* has been traditionally used to

describe programs developed for preschool children with special needs whereby a few typically developing children are included in the program to act as models. These programs are generally only half a day and are not part of the regular school system.

Our less typical method of inclusion was developed when we took the time to ask ourselves: What is the primary goal for including students with autism in the regular classroom? Was the purpose to develop academic skills or to build the social skills that are necessary to function as a part of a community? We educators knew that children with autism have difficulty with developing relationships (for example, recognizing social cues, communicating), and we questioned how "dropping" them into a classroom with 27 other students would help them to successfully grow academically or develop positive relationships with their peers. In the past my experience with inclusion usually meant students with autism joining my class for gym or sitting in the classroom with an EA while my students were engaged in an activity. Often students were overwhelmed by the big open spaces and noise of the gym and quickly lost self-control. In the classroom the activities didn't necessarily connect to their own class experiences and the presence of the EA altered the dynamics of my classroom. It seemed that neither their academic or social needs were being met.

Our solution was to have my regular students come to the Interactions classroom. In their own classroom, the students with autism feel secure, know the routines and are not overwhelmed by multiple changes that they have no control over. My students, because they are entering a less familiar learning space with more adults, are less frightened of the Interactions students and more willing to engage with them. It piques their curiosity to

enter a new learning environment, and I have emphasized that visiting the Interactions classroom is both a privilege and a responsibility. They get an adult-supported individual introduction to each Interactions student and receive modelling about how to best interact and communicate with these students. My students can ask questions about different learning tools and be shown that although the students with autism are different, they are also the same.

Embedding learning goals into familiar routines is the foundation of success for students with autism. Buddy time was introduced to all students with a social story and visual schedule, describing the expectations and supports that were in place during the reading activity. Students were explicitly taught the skills they would need to be successful, such as phrases for greeting one another and asking their buddy's name. Through this guided practice, a structured routine was established and followed each time students visited. In the beginning, the three adults took the lead in modelling communication strategies (such as how to use visuals or speech devices) but were gradually able to fade support as students became more comfortable interacting with one another.

Opportunities to practise greetings, turn-taking, conversational skills and self-regulation strategies naturally occurred in every session all while students enjoyed a low-demand shared reading experience. With simple adaptations, each child was able to access the activity at their own level—some nonverbal children had “adapted books,” sequencing the words in their sentence to show their understanding. Others used e-books or talking books to “read” to their peers. Advanced students even read texts that the Interactions class had written, which was particularly impressive to their Grade 1 buddies! There was a similar range of abilities in the Grade 1 group. Stronger students offered skillful reading and language modelling but also learned how to be patient with their peers, waiting until help was requested.

Toward the end of this project, students proudly modelled their expert communication strategies in an inclusion video for the school.

- Reinforcement is key—meaningful relationships reinforce social development and a love of learning
- Generalizing skills
- All children are competent; all children can contribute
- Most critical variable to inclusion success is the support system

Although initially the building of relationships was the primary goal, it quickly became apparent that there was also positive academic growth for both classrooms of students. My students became more fluent readers and increased their understanding of how to be a good reader and listener. The Interactions students became more enthusiastic about reading and also learned to be better listeners. I had fewer students in my classroom and could therefore provide more individual attention to those students who remained with me, and the staff in the Interactions classroom had the opportunity to build relationships and understandings of more typically developing students. It was win-win for adults and children.

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Joan McCully (*Interactions*)

Simone Shirvell (*Grade 1*)

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Indigenous Resources

Indspire—Indigenous Education, Canada's Future

<https://indspire.ca/for-educators/>

Walking Together—Learn Alberta

www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/

Spirit Horse

<http://spirithorse.ca/>

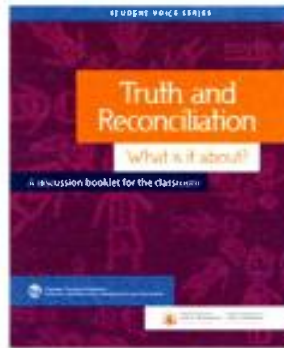
Empowering the Spirit: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education

<http://empoweringthespirit.ca/>



When We Were Alone

This picture book on the legacy of residential schools was written by David A. Robertson. Illustrated by Julie Flett. Winnipeg, Man: Highwater Press/Portage & Main Press, 2016. 24 pp.



Truth and Reconciliation: What Is It About?

Copies of this discussion booklet can be ordered on the Canadian Teachers' Federation website (www.ctf-fce.ca/) in English or French for only \$3 each.



Education Is Our Buffalo

ATA members can order a free hard copy by contacting Distribution at Barnett House at distribution@ata.ab.ca.

Beginning Teachers' Conference 2016

Many successes came out of the two Beginning Teachers' Conferences (BTC) this year.

New specialist council memberships:

- Edmonton BTC: 366 new memberships
- Calgary BTC: 240 new memberships

There was a full slate of sessions across the curricular and grade levels. Delegates found these sessions very timely and practical to their role as beginning teachers.

2017 BTCs will be held September 28–30 in Edmonton and October 12–14 in Calgary. If you are interested in submitting a proposal to lead a session, contact the Professional Development program area at the ATA.



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