

A Role for Mentoring and Collaborative Inquiry

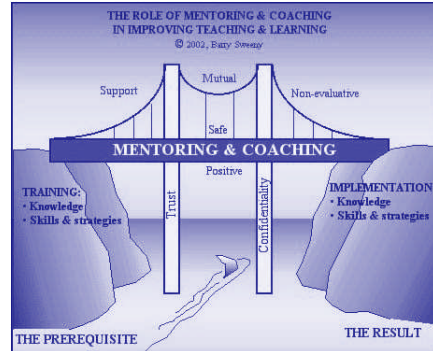
Carrie Melsom

What makes a teacher? In early childhood education training programs we have focused a lot on a core body of knowledge that addresses child development and wellbeing, family engagement, and developmentally appropriate practices. More recently teacher educators have been talking about teacher inquiry, reflective practice, creativity and intentionality when discussing teacher development over time.

There has long been a recognition that learning to teach in early childhood is an active and practical process that requires experience and engagement in real-life settings. Practicums are a key feature of teacher training programs and ideally provide student teachers with their first exposure to the potential power of an intentional professional mentoring relationship.

Carrying our understanding of the power of mentoring forward into the workplace and putting it into action has been problematic in ELCC environments due to the small scale of our programs and a lack of infrastructure. Typically any mentoring that occurs in

our workplaces is informal and unnamed by one or both participants. This tacit



mentoring-association.org (Barry Sweeny, 2003)

sharing of knowledge and “scripts for action” (Wien, 1995, p.13) can as easily hamper teacher growth as

support it. In a field that readily acknowledges and attempts to support socially constructed aspects of learning for young children we have not done much to formally support this type of learning for our teachers.

Traditional professional development formats can offer teachers new ideas or reinforce existing knowledge but does little when it comes to supporting teachers in testing and using this

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A Message from the Director

Dear ECE Colleagues,

As you will discover in this newsletter we are again offering a wide array of topics for our workshop series. From the overwhelming attendance we can see that this format is working for most of you.

We would like to suggest that there are other ways that you and your colleagues can be accessing professional development through NSCECE. We have many resources (human and material) to support the very important work that you do. The PD funding through the ECEG now allows you to take part in professional development in unique ways.

- What is your staff interested in?
- Does your staff have any specific needs?

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Inside this issue:

- *Mentoring & Collaboration*
 - *New In the Resource Centre*
 - *Activities for Mentor & Protégé*
- A publication informing the early childhood education community of events, services and professional development opportunities offered by the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education*

Please circulate and post this newsletter!

E-mail: info@nscece.ca
to be added to our e-mail list or
visit our website at
www.nscece.ca

Mentoring and Collaborative Inquiry

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knowledge in practice. Coaching within a mentoring relationship, collaborating, thinking together, sharing perspectives and asking questions, and using protocols of inquiry and reflection are all methods that can assist teachers as they engage with new ideas and begin to apply and experiment with them in practice.

The positive potential of formal mentoring programs, critical friends and learning communities have been well documented for their power in transforming teaching and school communities. The Nova Scotia Department of Community Services has recently recognized this and has included funding for these types of professional growth frameworks in Section 4A of your Early Childhood Enhancement Grant (ECEG). Gone are the days when the only option was to send staff off to a workshop and hope that something stuck.

So what are some things centres can do to support professional growth in addition to providing workshops? Establishing a formal in-house mentoring program is certainly high on the list of possibilities. Mentoring programs build on resources you already have to improve satisfaction, develop leadership and support the development of new skills for mentors and protégés. An excellent resource for centres thinking about establishing a mentoring program is available on-line from Head Start. It's called *Putting the Pro In Protégé*.

ECEG funds could be used to provide release time for mentors and protégés to observe each other in action and meet together; cover the cost of mentoring skills development workshops; and possibly cover some forms of administrative support for the program. I would encourage you to explore ideas you might have with your consultant. As an additional support we will be offering a five module mentoring skills development series Thursdays from 1:30-4:30 PM starting October 4. Please check the

workshop schedule for further details.

Another possibility is to create a community of practice within or among centres. This type of collaborative learning model is invigorated by the use of for-



mal protocols that help to support a culture of inquiry into and about practice. In her article *Communities of Practice for Professional Development* available on (wikispaces.umb.edu) Margie Carter outlines possibilities for this type of approach. She identifies these groups by their willingness to “engage in a disciplined dialogue to uncover the possible significance of their documentation of

In Early Childhood Education job-embedded professional development grows out of collaborative relationships and a culture of inquiry into practice.

children’s play and learning, and the implications for their teaching.” She goes on to identify the valuable role of the critical friend in this

process, a peer or mentor, who asks probing questions to raise issues that relate to children’s play and work. (Carter, 2009, p.21)

I also want to mention Certification as a possibility. This excellent approach to individual professional development is facilitated by the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia. Using ECEG funds to cover the cost of a substitute will make it easier than ever to support qualified teachers as they apply for and engage in this nine month process.

During the certification process teachers reflect on their own practice using fifteen defined criteria; write a self-evaluation report and observe and report on the practice of other members of their triplet; each triplet is mentored throughout the process; and finally each candidate is assessed in the classroom by a validator. One feature of certification is that triplet members work in different centres. It’s exciting that this rich opportunity to broaden perspectives is built into the process. To learn more about certification follow the link to the Council’s webpage located on the Child Care Connections site at www.cccns.org.

Exploring new possibilities for professional development will require more than being able to allocate time for these new activities. Programs and teachers also need to explore and commit to a different vision of professional development—one that moves it from the realm of the individual to one that embraces and supports collaborative growth for team members. The potential power of these approaches is obvious in a field where team teaching is the norm. What makes a teacher? For many of us it’s the team. Why not explore some possibilities with your team this year. Directors and Program Coordinators interested in learning more are welcome to join NSCECE’s Leading Edge Discussion Group for more in-depth exploration of the possibilities outlined in this article.

Message

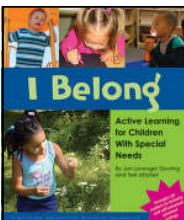
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If you have a professional development need/interest and our regular workshops do not meet that need you can contact me to discuss the possibility of professional development designed specifically for your centre.

Jane Cawley, Executive Director, NSCECE
423-7114 Ext. 222
1-877-323-3382
janecawley@nscece.ca

New In the Resource Centre

The Resource Centre has many learning materials and books available to support you in your work. You can look for membership information and check out our on-line toy inventory at www.nscece.ca.

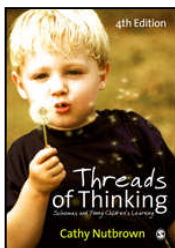


I Belong: Active Learning for Children With Special Needs (371.9 D)

This High/Scope publication outlines how their active learning model and daily routines support the inclusion and learning of children with special needs.

Threads of Thinking: Schemas and Young Children's Learning (155.5 NUT)

Schema theory offers teachers a way to think and talk about the patterns of behaviour and thought that underlie many of the activities of young children. This book addresses basic questions and provides guidelines for practice in early learning programs.

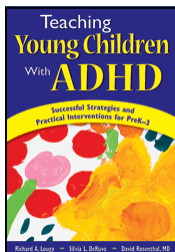
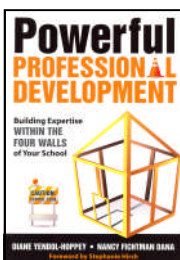


Flow's Rhythms, & Intensities of Early Childhood Education Curriculum (372 PA)

A thought provoking collection of articles from researchers and educators as they consider curriculum processes, "truths" about early childhood education and how evolving images of children and educators can transform practice.

Powerful Professional Development: Building Expertise Within the Four Walls of Your School (371 Y)

Offers strategies for job-embedded professional learning in an educational environment. Provides tips for developing a PD program by matching professional development tools to your needs.

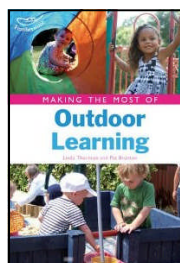


Teaching Young Children With ADHD: Successful Strategies and Practical Interventions for PreK-3 (371.9 LO)

A general resource for teachers of young children to help them better understand ADHD and how it affects development. This book also offers many practical strategies for working with children in classroom settings.

Making the Most of Outdoor Learning (371.6 T)

A lovely pictorial provocation highlighting good practices around outdoor learning for young children. The emergent approach to learning explored in this book also references the British Early Years Framework.



New On-Line Inventory

The NSCECE Resource Centre is pleased to announce the addition of a new on-line searchable inventory located under the Resource Centre tab of our website. Over 900 items are included in this database with more being added all the time. You can search for toys by name, topic or age group. Many items include a photo so that you can see if the item meets your needs. If you are looking for books about a particular topic give us a call at 423-7114 Ext. 233 or e-mail circulation@nscece.ca.

www.nscece.ca

Resource Centre Discussion & Support Groups



All Together Now! Inclusion Support Group

We meet 9:00—11:00 AM on the last Thursday of each month at the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education. Join colleagues for facilitated discussion about issues relating to inclusive early learning programs. Share strategies, insights, and challenges as part of a learning community.

The Leading Edge: A Discussion Group for Administrators

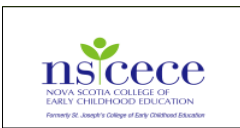
A discussion and support group for people who have a leadership role in an early childhood program. This facilitated group meets 10:00—Noon, the second Thursday of each month in the NSCECE Resource Centre.

For more information:

Call Carrie Melsom

423-7114 Ext. 227

Resource Centre services are offered with support from the Department of Community Services, Early Childhood Education Training Initiative.



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NSCECE College and Lab School Staff participated in a professional development and team building retreat that focused on intentionality (May 2012).

At the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education, we provide an opportunity for students to study and gain experience in Early Childhood Education through a diverse range of courses and practical settings.

We are proud to lay a foundation for the personal and professional growth and development of our students. It is our hope and goal that NSCECE graduates continue to learn, practice and reflect throughout their years in early childhood education.



Join the crowd—become a member today!

Take advantage of the many services provided with a NSCECE Resource Centre membership

Resources for the early childhood community



To download an Information Brochure or Membership Form visit www.nscece.ca

E-mail: resourcecentre@nscece.ca

Tel: (902) 423-7114 ext. 227



Activity Ideas for Mentors and Protégés

Carrie Melsom

Deciding what to do is an important element of the mentoring relationship. Setting goals and planning mentoring activities sets this type of relationship aside from the more informal forms of support that colleagues might typically offer each other. In *Putting the Pro in Protégé* the authors outline the value of matching mentor strategies to principles of adult learning. They suggest:

- 1) Encouraging protégés to build on their own knowledge
- 2) Focusing on what is important in protégé's work environment
- 3) Helping protégés set goals and objectives
- 4) Using a variety of learning strategies based on the protégé's learning style (Head Start, 2001, p. 55)

The following list highlights some of the range of activities that might be undertaken by a mentor and protégé.



- Spend time building a relationship
- Negotiate ground rules for working together
- Discuss protégé's personal vision for growth
- Share career stories
- Engage in a book study together
- Discuss a quote that has meaning or inspires
- Discuss activities, curriculum ideas or children using the Thinking Lens for Reflective Teaching (www.ecetrainers.com)
- Reflect on, then discuss, one of the questions posed in the list 23 Extraordinary Questions to ask your Mentor (bigfishtopdogs.com)
- Choose a focus or skill and observe one another in action in the classroom. Explore your observations together
- Videotape an activity or interaction and watch it together. Explore your reactions
- Investigate documentation together
- Discuss protégé's strengths. What do people say? Mentor can share observations too
- Reorganize or enrich a learning area in your classroom
- Discuss protégé's growth areas and tentative plans for addressing them—choose 1 to 3
- Utilize a critical friends protocol to examine curriculum
- Discuss how feedback will be given and received—identify things to avoid
- Celebrate your work together
- Write back and forth in a reflective journal