

**THE COMMUNITY EARLY LEARNING AND
CHILD CARE FACILITATORS PILOT
PROJECT**

An Evaluation of the First Year of the Project

October, 2012

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Executive Summary

This document is an evaluation of the first year of the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project, which began in October 2011 and concluded in June 2012.

The Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project is an innovative model of supporting quality child care in British Columbia. The model, the first of its kind in British Columbia, draws on the foundation created by the groundbreaking Investigating Quality (IQ) Project, which was funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development from 2005 to 2011. The model also takes inspiration from internationally respected and tested models of supporting high quality child care in Sweden, New Zealand, and Reggio Emilia, Italy.

The new pilot project incorporates the philosophy of the IQ project and some of its major activities, such as monthly learning circles for Early Childhood Educators, but incorporates a new Community Facilitator position. In the two pilot communities (Victoria and Coquitlam), community facilitators make regular visits to early years centres and collaborate with educators in documenting and reflecting on children's learning, introducing new materials, and transforming the early years environment to better support children's learning. The project is also a key support to the continued implementation of the *BC Early Learning Framework*, introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2008.

The project was coordinated by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, co-director, along with Dr. Alan Pence, of the Unit for Early Years Research and Development (web.uvic.ca/~eyrd). Dr. Allison Benner, a research fellow at the Unit, completed the documentation and analysis of the project. The Unit is well known for its commitment to innovative field-based research and professional development across a range of early years settings. In addition to coordinating the IQ Project, the Unit also led the *BC Early Learning Framework* Implementation Project from 2008 to 2010.

This evaluation is based on a qualitative methodology that incorporates field-based observations, focus groups, and interviews and surveys with educators, Community facilitators, and families.

The evaluation findings indicate that the first year of the pilot project was highly successful. While many educators reported feeling uncertain about the project's purpose and activities at the outset of the project, their appreciation of the project activities, and the degree of change that occurred in their centres, tended to grow the longer they participated. All educators would be interested in continuing to work with this model, and none reported any negative effects, beyond the significant time commitment required to participate in the project.

All educators felt that the project had generated lasting change in diverse aspects of their practice. Educators reported improvements in their knowledge of contemporary early years theory and issues, in their ability to produce pedagogical documentations,

and in their capacity to engage in critically reflective practice. Their relationships with colleagues, children, and families were strengthened. In particular, the project enabled them to better attend to children's ideas and theories, and to adapt the centres' environment, activities, and daily routines to better support children's learning, resulting, in most participants' assessments, in higher quality child care programs. Educators cited the value of the learning circles, the centre visits, the communication between visits, and the combined effects of the project's activities, as highly instrumental in stimulating this ongoing process of change.

In October, 2012, the pilot project will enter its second year. To build on the successes of the first year, and to provide a basis for expanding the model to more communities in the future, this report makes the following recommendations:

1. Develop a cumulative evaluation of the first two years of the pilot project and use the documentation for the evaluation to develop educational resources for Pedagogical Facilitators, educators, and families who may participate in future deliveries of the project model (see recommendations 2, 3, and 4 below).
2. Document the strategies and processes used by community facilitators in their work with educators, and use this documentation to create (a) a resource that future community facilitators can use to orient themselves to their work; and (b) the foundation for a university-level course and/or series of workshops on the role of the community facilitator in early years practice. As more Community Facilitator positions are created in the future, provide opportunities for ongoing sharing and mentorship between facilitators, both face-to-face and online.
3. Document the strategies and processes used by participating educators in their work with community facilitators, their colleagues, and children, and use this documentation to create an educational resource that community facilitators can use in recruiting new centres to the project and that educators can use when learning to work within this model.
4. Enhance opportunities for meaningful family involvement in the project by hosting a meeting for families at the beginning of the second year of the project, in which: (a) the findings from the first year of the project can be presented; (b) the purpose of the project can be discussed in greater depth; and (c) families can communicate their aspirations for the project in their children's centres. At the end of the year, conduct a focus group with families, and use this information (a) as part of the cumulative evaluation of the project and (b) as the basis for an educational resource for families who participate in this project in the future.
5. Within the funding available for the second year of the project, support community facilitators to work more intensively with a smaller number of early years centres, allowing for longer and/or more frequent visits to the participating centres. Also, provide support for community facilitators to visit each other's sites periodically, so they can share creative practices and lessons learned throughout the project.

6. Create a secure online space where community facilitators and interested educators in the project site communities can post and access relevant literature and share and discuss pedagogical documentations with one another throughout the project.

This document is structured as follows: The Introduction provides background information about the project, including its history, goals, and main components. The Methodology section describes the project participants and the methodology employed for the evaluation. The next section, Project Components, discusses participants' assessments of the project activities, including the learning circles, the visits to the participating child care centres, and the effectiveness of the model as a whole. The fourth section, Project Outcomes, describes the project's effects on participants' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, on their relationships with colleagues, children, and families; and on various features of the early years program they deliver, including its quality, the materials employed in the program, the design of the environment, and the centres' schedules and routines. The final section of the document discusses the overall findings of the report, and makes recommendations for future deliveries of the program.

Introduction

The report is an evaluation of the first year (2011-2012) of the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project. This project was led by Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Dr. Alan Pence, co-directors of the Unit for Early Years Research and Development at the University of Victoria. Dr. Allison Benner, a research fellow at the Unit, was the main evaluator of the pilot project, and is a co-author of this report.

This pilot project draws on the foundation created by earlier phases of the Investigating Quality (IQ) Project, which was delivered from 2005 to 2011, with funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The IQ Project is rooted in internationally respected and tested theories and practices that differ from those often seen in North American early years practice. These theories and practices broaden and deepen discussions of quality, and open up to local voices and to contextual factors that influence quality early years programming.

In 2011, the Ministry for Children and Family Development provided funding to build on the foundation created by the IQ Project by developing and implementing the Community Early Years and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project. The goals of the project are to:

- increase the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in BC;
- create a new community-based model for early learning and child care that links to existing community-based initiatives in the province;
- build and sustain professionalism within the early learning and child care sector so that it can act as a full partner in promoting BC's economic development, now and in the future;
- enhance and sustain quality in early learning and child care settings; and
- enhance children's learning opportunities, experiences, and outcomes in early learning and child care settings.

In October 2011, the Unit launched the first phase of the pilot project on Vancouver Island (Victoria) and the Lower Mainland (Coquitlam). As in the IQ project, participating educators in the project attend monthly learning circles. At the learning circles, educators critically reflect on their practice through pedagogical documentations, discuss recent theoretical perspectives in the field, and learn about innovative ways to transform the early years environment. As well, educators discuss practice in relation to the *BC Early Learning Framework*, ensuring the ongoing implementation of this important document in BC early years settings. The educators then explore these perspectives in their centres, engaging in an ongoing, seamless process of action and reflection.

A new feature in the pilot project is the creation of the Community Facilitator position. In addition to coordinating the monthly learning circles, community facilitators play a role similar to that of pedagogistas in the centres of Reggio Emilia, Italy: immersing

themselves in the centres, supporting the educators' efforts to engage with children and families in innovative, critically reflective practice, and extending the practice of the educators and the children by introducing new ideas, materials, and media, often with the assistance of an artist, or atelierista. The ongoing visits of the community facilitators provide for a richer, deeper exploration of the perspectives introduced in the IQ Project, and also create stronger links between participating educators at the community level.

Methodology

Project Recruitment

The two community facilitators began approaching prospective early years centres in August 2011, with the intention of launching the project in October, 2011, at the first monthly learning circle. Prospective centres were provided with written information about the project, and were invited to discuss the project with the community facilitator and the project co-directors. Educators who agreed to participate in the centres signed a consent form (Appendix A) and a confidentiality agreement (Appendix B).

Educators in the participating centres provided families with an information letter about the project (Appendix C). Like the educators, families were invited to discuss the project with the project co-directors. Parents who agreed to have their child participate in the project activities signed a consent form (Appendix D) and a permission form (Appendix E) if they were willing to have photographs and videotapes made of their child, and if they were willing to have this documentation shared in project activities (e.g., in pedagogical documentations shared at learning circles).

Project Participants

In Coquitlam, five participating centres were identified by October, 2011. The five participating centres included:

- a privately owned, licensed preschool, with morning and afternoon classes. The centre enrolls 40 three- and four-year-old children, who are evenly split between the morning and afternoon classes. Four educators, including the centre director and owner, participated in the project.
- a provincially funded family and child drop-in program for children aged birth to five (StrongStart), running from 8:45–11:45 daily. On any given day, approximately 35-40 children and families attend the program, though the total enrolment is much larger. One educator, the program facilitator, participated in the project.
- a licensed group child care and preschool centre, based in an elementary school. The project focused on the preschool program, in which eight children participate. One educator, the lead teacher in the program, participated in the project.
- a privately owned, home-based licensed multi-age group family child care centre, enrolling eight children. One educator, the centre manager, participated in the project.
- a licensed non-profit group child care centre for children aged 3-5, enrolling 25 children. Five educators, including the program coordinator and the lead teacher, participated in the program.

In Victoria, four centres had been recruited to participate by October, 2011, but two withdrew from the project in the first two months. An additional centre agreed to participate in November. The three centres that participated in the project were:

- a provincially funded family and child drop-in program for children aged birth to five (StrongStart), running from 8:45–11:45 daily. On any given day, approximately 25-32 children and families attend the program, though the total enrolment is over 200. One educator, the program facilitator, participated in the project.
- a licensed preschool for children aged 3-5, enrolling 23 children. One educator, the program manager, participated in the program.
- A licensed child care centre, offering half-day preschool, full-time child care, and out-of-school care for children aged 3-7 for approximately 60 children. Nine educators, including the centre Director, participated in the project.

In total, 23 educators participated in the project, 12 in Coquitlam, and 11 in Victoria). Eleven educators had a college ECE diploma or certificate, and 12 had a college or university degree. Two of the participating educators had 3-5 years of experience working with children, nine had 5-10 years' experience, and 12 had more than 10 years' experience.

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation employs a qualitative methodology. The findings and recommendations reported in this evaluation report are based on focus groups, interviews, and written surveys conducted in June and July, 2012.

In June 2012, the evaluator conducted focus groups with participating educators in Victoria and Coquitlam at the monthly learning circle. This focus group focused on the educators' experiences of the learning circles, including the process of pedagogical documentation and the project readings, and the relationship of the learning circles to other components of the pilot project. The questions used for these focus groups are listed in Appendix F.

The evaluator also distributed a written survey to all participating educators (Appendix G) and to the two community facilitators (Appendix H). Participants were given the option of responding to the questions in writing or in a face-to-face or telephone interview. Five participants chose to answer the questions in an interview setting, while the remaining participants responded to the questions in writing.

Families at participating centres were also invited to participate in the evaluation. A written survey was distributed to each centre (Appendix I) and interested families informed the centres of their intention to participate. Six families responded to the survey, three in Coquitlam, and three in Victoria.

In addition, the project evaluator regularly attended learning circles in Victoria and Coquitlam, and made monthly visits to four selected centres, two in each project site. The observations and documentation conducted by the evaluator in the learning circles and in the ongoing visits will inform the cumulative evaluation of the pilot project, to be completed at the end of its second year, in 2013. These observations also provided the evaluator with contextual information on the project that has assisted in the interpretation of the data collected for this evaluation report.

Project Components: Participants' Experiences

This section of the report describes the participants' experiences of the project: the learning circles, the pedagogical facilitators' visits to the participating centres, and the participants' evaluations of the project model, as a whole.

Learning Circles

From October 2011 to June 2012, participants attended monthly learning circles in Victoria and Coquitlam, which were facilitated by the pedagogical facilitators, sometimes with the assistance of the project co-director. These learning circles were held in the evenings and lasted approximately three hours.

In preparation for the learning circles, participants read book chapters and/or articles that focused on contemporary theories and practices relating to the early years. Many of the readings were grounded in post-foundational theories and their application to early years settings. These readings were intended to familiarize educators with “cutting edge” theories about the image of the child, the early childhood educator, and the early years environment, and to stimulate reflection and discussion about early years practice and the design of environments for young children.

In addition, every month, educators from participating centres presented a pedagogical documentation of an everyday moment of children's learning in their practice, following a protocol of critical reflection introduced to the participants at the outset of the project. In this protocol, educators presented their documentations, while others listened and wrote their reflections about the documentation. Based on these reflections, educators were then invited to pose questions about the documentation to the presenter, who was then given the opportunity to reflect on the questions for a period of 10-15 minutes before responding. These responses then served as the foundation for discussion of practice issues. Educators were encouraged to discuss their pedagogical documentations in relation to the *BC Early Learning Framework* and to the readings introduced throughout the project.

Most of the time, the meetings were hosted in the same location every month and followed a similar format. However, occasionally, the monthly learning circle was held elsewhere in the community and/or differed in focus. For example, in Victoria, the local Child Care Resource and Referral centre hosted the April learning circle, and provided funding for a dinner and photography workshop by Dr. Sylvia Kind. The same workshop was offered to project participants in Coquitlam. Finally, the June learning circle in Coquitlam was held at UniverCity Childcare, a new child care centre at Simon Fraser University; participants were given a tour of the new building and grounds, and an orientation to the centre's Reggio-inspired philosophy and practice.

Of all the project components, the learning circles were the most “developed” feature, in that the format for the learning circles had been developed over several years (2005-2011) through the Investigating Quality Project.

In the sections below, the educators' and community facilitators' perceptions of the learning circles in general are presented, along with their experiences of specific aspects of the learning circles, such as the readings and the pedagogical documentations.

General Perceptions

In individual responses and in focus groups conducted at the learning circles, the educators and the community facilitators expressed unanimous appreciation for the learning circles. The comments below capture the overall experience of the learning circles for the two community facilitators:

I think one of the greatest successes is bringing practitioners together for dialogue and reflection in the learning circles. I think the community collaborative model is a powerful force for professional development and change in our field.
(Community Facilitator, Victoria)

I found the learning circles to be a great setting for the educators to deepen their engagements with everyday practice through the collaborative reflective protocol ... for instance, looking beyond activities to deepen explorations, experimentations with pedagogical narrations, looking at materials, and engaging with materials in new ways. (Community Facilitator, Coquitlam)

Educators valued the opportunity to meet practitioners from outside their centres, to reflect on practice in a safe, trusting environment, and to learn about new ideas and approaches to early years practice. Many educators noted that over the months, they became increasingly comfortable with the learning circles, which allowed them to delve into more and more complex or controversial subjects. Moreover, many educators commented that the learning circles stimulated reflection and discussion among their colleagues on an ongoing basis. Finally, several educators noted the uniqueness of the learning circles, citing the lack of such opportunities in their communities or the difficulty of sustaining such meetings without the support of a skilled facilitator.

The comments below are representative of the range of perceptions expressed by educators in the project about the learning circles:

I found it very interesting to hear different people's perspectives. ... It was really very rich. I found it really made me think, all the questions we came up with ... I really brought it back to my work. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Because I work as a sole ECE in my centre, it's just been a golden opportunity for me to ... collaborate with colleagues. (Educator, Victoria)

For me, the model of the learning circles, the creation of a space where one can be safe and vulnerable, and know or not know, was great. ... I

think we really need more of that “safe vulnerability” to grow. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I found that at our centre, we talked about the learning circles for weeks afterwards.” (Educator, Victoria)

I’ve never really been involved on a regular monthly basis to talk about [practice] before, more just workshops. So this has just been really stimulating ... this has been my favourite part of the project. (Educator, Victoria)

[Where I used to live], we had a monthly discussion and a discussion online, but it didn’t last long – it lasted about 6-8 months and then it fell through. (Educator, Victoria)

Pedagogical Documentation

The opportunity to critically reflect on pedagogical documentation with other educators at the learning circles—and to carry this collaborative reflection into daily practice—was a new and valuable experience for many project participants. In discussing specific opportunities offered by the learning circles, many educators cited their experiences of pedagogical documentation as the most important aspect of the learning circles.

For many educators in the project, the practice of completing and presenting pedagogical documentations was novel and transformative. Most educators had completed some form of “learning story” prior to their participation in this project, but the use of pedagogical documentation as a form of research into children’s learning and into their own perceptions of practice was new.

Also, pedagogical documentation provided educators with the opportunity to connect their observations of children’s learning to the *BC Early Learning Framework*.

Finally, over the course of the project, educators who were initially concerned about doing pedagogical narration in “the right way”—a common theme of discussion at the learning circles in the early stages of the project—came to appreciate the diverse styles and approaches that educators brought to their narrations, rather than focusing on a specific, pre-set form of documentation.

The following comments by community facilitators and educators highlight participants’ experiences of pedagogical documentation:

I was always amazed at and appreciative of the depth of some of the questions that arose as educators contemplated a pedagogical narration, and also the thoughtfulness with which the educators engaged with the questions that were posed to them. I found this to be a very useful way for educators to engage with “previously unthought of” aspects of everyday practice. (Community Facilitator, Coquitlam)

I had never gotten an opportunity to share [pedagogical documentations] in a group ... the other thing was to be exposed to all the different styles of doing narrations. (Educator, Coquitlam)

There's a lot of relating to the *Early Learning Framework*, which I didn't do much before, so from the learning circles I'm trying to get more connected to that." (Educator, Coquitlam)

For our centre ... it's a really unique, rare opportunity to really share your ideas, and challenge each other ... really draw out "what do you really mean there? what are you trying to get across, or what do you value? why do we do it that way, ... or is that really necessary?" It's just so hard in our field to find the time to discuss those things with each other. (Educator, Victoria)

I found it really valuable hearing others' pedagogical documentations, hearing their reflections, and I found in my practice I was really able to build on what I saw everyone doing ... when I went back into my program, I was thinking about all the things we had said. (Educator, Victoria)

Project Readings

As noted above, prior to each learning circle, educators were asked to complete a number of readings. Also, community facilitators sometimes shared readings with educators between learning circles.

Some of these readings were highly theoretical in nature and employed philosophical vocabulary and concepts to which most of the educators had little or no previous exposure. Other readings, though grounded in similar post-foundational philosophies, were more explicitly linked to specific aspects of early years practice (for example, schedules, gender issues, the use of materials in early years settings).

Nearly everybody in the project commented that the readings were challenging, and many educators expressed frustration about the time and effort taken to complete the readings. The following comments are representative of this perspective:

I wouldn't say I resented [the readings] but I didn't think I was signing on for a philosophy circle. (Educator, Victoria)

I did find a lot of [the readings] really difficult. And I voiced that earlier on, that they were very long and very hard to read, and so I appreciated that we could be honest and say this is too hard and I don't have time to read this ..." (Educator, Coquitlam)

Despite such frustrations, most educators saw value in working through the readings in the project, though some educators suggested that it might have been preferable to start with the more practice-based readings (i.e., the articles) first before moving on to the more theoretical readings (i.e., the book used for the project). Several educators noted that the readings became easier to digest with time, and highlighted the value of an intellectual engagement with their chosen field.

At first, I found the readings very challenging ... that whole postmodern theory, it was my first exposure to it. Once I started looking at the other readings, it started to make sense. The learning circles helped as well, because one of the things I found really missing is figuring out how to apply what I was reading in a really practical way – it took a lot of thinking through, reflecting. (Educator, Victoria)

It is like learning a new language ... The exciting part is it challenges you, it forces you to think. Whereas before ... it would have been a question of memorizing a theory, and usually developmental theories. But now it's the questioning, "is it really that way, or is there a way to look at it differently?" (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think we need to engage with our practice in more philosophical ways, because we live these philosophies every day. And so yes, it was hard, but I think we need that challenge, we need to look at other resources and continue growing in our field." (Educator, Coquitlam)

Perhaps most significantly, several educators noted that, over time, they were able to make connections between the readings and their practice, whether in pedagogical documentations, in their relationships with colleagues and families, or in daily practice with children:

One of the first documentations I prepared ... was very much my own thoughts and reflections, and I remember that [the community facilitator] gave me some articles to think about ... and in my next documentation I really tried to incorporate some of the thoughts that came from the article ... It did help me to think more deeply and to think ... through a different lens. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think the way I do narrations has definitely been affected by the readings that we've been doing about materials and other things. When I look at my documentations from before the project, they are totally different. ... Doing all the readings totally changed the way I reflect on things. (Educator, Coquitlam)

There are some articles that you connect with, that have more of a meaning for you, a quote or a passage that you become excited about, and then when you're talking to a parent or a colleague, that passion comes

out, and you have another tool to use in connecting with them.” (Educator, Coquitlam)

Some of the readings about practising for freedom or seeing children as citizens, all that is kind of in my face in [my centre]. ... I’m getting the opportunity to hear what the parents are saying to the children as they’re going to paint or ... they’re being asked to be quiet when they’re playing or they’re being told how to use the materials. ... the readings are giving me information to engage in conversation with them so that I can break down some of those [assumptions people are making]. (Educator, Victoria)

Challenges

The primary challenges confronted in the learning circles related to community facilitators’ and educators’ gradually developing the skills, trust, and comfort to engage fully in the discussions. In the words of one community facilitator:

I found the learning circles challenging and I have learned a great deal. I have not been in the role of facilitator before, which is quite different from being a presenter where one can give information. The challenges of having attendees who were ... uncomfortable, withdrawn, or simply silent, learning how to bring the conversation back to the ideas, directing the dialogue, and learning how to challenge people without being rude, all this has been a learning experience for me. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

Many participants commented on the time it took to gradually develop sufficient comfort to speak openly, to give and receive critical feedback, and to confront controversial topics. The comments of three educators from Coquitlam capture the nature of this progression over the course of the project:

To start a new approach is not always easy. ... It takes time for everybody to participate and find balance with every change. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think it was difficult to accept [critical feedback] at the beginning. It was really scary being out there. I think it’s important to recognize the time it takes to build that conversation. We’re just getting comfortable with it now. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I really enjoyed the provocative and interesting topics we discussed ... and I loved to watch everybody opening up slowly and learning how to be honest. Because remember at the beginning when everybody was afraid to speak up openly? I was so afraid to voice my opinion! But then we all began to open up. (Educator, Coquitlam)

In Victoria, a similar pattern of growing trust was noted by most educators who participated in the learning circles. However, in this group, nine of the 11 regular

participants at the learning circle were from a single centre that joined the learning circles two months into the project. Thus, at the conclusion of the project, the process of building trust and comfort was at an earlier stage than in Coquitlam, as reflected in the following comments by one educator and by the community facilitator:

The learning circles were a great opportunity to share and listen to others' ideas and concerns, but seemed rather reserved or perhaps censored.
(Educator, Victoria)

To be able to share practice, it has to be within a group of trust. Otherwise, the difficult parts never really get shared and you're just skimming the surface all the time. And I don't know that we've got to that point in this group. I don't know that people are sharing difficult issues yet ... so that's what I hope for [next year], to get deeper, get into the riskier things, the silences that we don't talk about in our field, the challenging issues that we face that aren't talked about. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

Future Directions

In discussing future deliveries of the project, participants made several suggestions about how the experience of the learning circles might be enhanced. These suggestions include:

- Hosting meetings in different locations (e.g., at the participating centres, at other project sites, i.e., Coquitlam participants visiting the Victoria learning circle);
- Inviting more guest lecturers (e.g., educators who have been working on a model like this one, authors, experts in the field, etc.);
- Incorporating more hands-on and/or outdoor experiences (e.g., playing with clay while talking about clay, being outdoors while talking about nature);
- Having fewer readings and more visual/multimedia activities; and
- Involving more centres from the community.

Community Facilitators' Visits to Centres

As noted earlier, the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators' Pilot Project grew out of the foundation created by the IQ Project from 2005 to 2011. The central component of the IQ project was the learning circles. Successive evaluations of the learning circles indicated their usefulness in promoting reflective practice and strengthening connections between early years practitioners, among other benefits. However, it was not clear from these evaluations whether the perspectives being introduced and discussed in the learning circles through the IQ Project were being effectively translated into practice with children and families.

To address this potential gap, this pilot project introduced the Community Facilitator position. One of the major roles of the community facilitator is to work with

participating centres to engage educators in translating the ideas introduced in the learning circles into everyday practice. The community facilitators' regular visits to participating centres are a key element in this goal.

Typical activities of community facilitators during these visits include:

- documenting children's learning through writing, photographs, and videorecordings;
- introducing new materials (e.g., clay, sand, string, wire, paint);
- setting up provocations (e.g., setting out materials in new or unexpected ways and observing children's engagement with them) and suggesting ways to extend children's activities and inquiries;
- assisting educators in changing the environment to better support children's learning (e.g., creating a mini-atelier for art materials, moving furniture or materials to make them more accessible or inviting, removing generic posters to make more space to display pedagogical documentations and children's project work);
- discussing and helping to implement practice-related ideas with educators, drawing on readings and discussions from the learning circles (e.g., adopting more flexible schedules such as open snack time and/or dropping a set schedule altogether, allowing children a greater voice in negotiating centre rules and routines, providing more opportunities for outdoor play and using "indoor" materials outside);
- supporting educators in everyday tasks, especially those made more challenging because of activities introduced by the project (e.g., helping to clean up from messy activities resulting from a provocation).

At the outset of the project, the community facilitators visited all participating centres (four in Victoria, five in Coquitlam) on a weekly basis for approximately one hour per visit. In Victoria, however, one centre withdrew from the project after 2-3 months, so the community facilitator visited the three remaining centres for a longer time each week. In Coquitlam, where all five centres participated for the duration of the project, it soon became evident that weekly visits, supported by other project activities, were not possible within the 18 hours per week assigned to the community facilitator. Thus, for the last five months of the project, the community facilitator in Coquitlam visited the participating centres on a bi-weekly basis.

For the first half of the project, the community facilitators were sometimes accompanied on their visits by an atelierista, who assisted in setting up art-related provocations and in extending children's art-based inquiries. However, midway through the project, the atelierista was unable to continue in the project.

While community facilitators and educators were provided with some general perspectives about the purpose and nature of the visits, no specific activities or objectives were established in advance. Rather, community facilitators and educators established relationships over the term of the project and collaborated in deciding what

to do together during the visits, based on the particular needs and aspirations of the participating centres as they unfolded over the months.

General Perceptions

All participating educators commented on the value of the community facilitators' visits to the centres. In general, centres who had participated the longest in the project seemed to derive the greatest benefits from the visits.

Many educators commented on the benefit of having an extra person coming into the centre to share ideas with and help with the delivery of the program:

I think that any additional support strengthens a program. There is only so much one can do as an Early Childhood Educator. It can be a very draining profession emotionally, mentally, and physically. To have another person's reflections and encouragement helps to give the program more energy. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think it's always neat to have another set of eyes there, just to bounce ideas off, and as we developed a relationship with [the facilitator] we became more comfortable to ask "what do you think of this?" (Educator, Victoria)

I felt alone before this project, that I was basically working by myself. I often reflected on the program, but it's not the same as when someone comes in and works with me. The facilitator is so great at reflecting on my thoughts. She can often catch the points that I talked about and bounce ideas back on how to take actions. I appreciate that. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think it's been good to be able to bounce some ideas off her as well, when it comes to extending activities or presenting things in a slightly different way – I think that's been really useful. (Educator, Victoria)

The community facilitators' willingness to "sometimes blend in" with regularly scheduled activities in the centres helped to establish trust and rapport, both of which were critical to allowing the community facilitators to eventually question and "trouble" practice in the participating centres. Over time, community facilitators were able to bring knowledge and perspectives to their visits that are specific to this pilot project:

The visits by the community facilitator and atelierista were priceless. The feedback, ideas, and discussions were an immeasurable source of knowledge. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The visits of the pedagogical facilitator and the atelierista pushed me to think about the environment, about setting up the explorations, and about ways to discuss with the children our everyday moments. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I like the visits of the community facilitator because that's the time when we shared ideas, observed children together, and [she] even brought in materials sometimes that related to the activities. I also like it when she took pictures and shared with me her reflections afterwards. It helped me with my documentations. I find these onsite visits and discussions are so meaningful and important for me in planning the program. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The visits from [the Community Facilitator] were always helpful to the program, a source of inspiration to try something new because we had the extra help and her expertise to evaluate the activity with. (Educator, Victoria)

I really enjoyed when [the Community Facilitator] came in. She was a great asset, kept us on our toes, and kept questioning us and pushing us—but not in a bad way, a very open-ended way, and that was great. (Educator, Victoria)

Without the visits, I don't think I would have had as deep a commitment as I have [now] ... working alongside with [the Community Facilitator] and having her question what I'm doing, in a good way ... somebody to collaborate with and have as a consultant and a mentor as well. (Educator, Victoria)

Connections to the Learning Circles

The community facilitators' visits were a major support in helping to translate the ideas introduced and discussed in the learning circles into everyday practice. In turn, the discussions and activities that took place during the visits to the centres tended to provide for stimulating discussions on practice in the learning circles, suggesting that these two major components of the pilot project worked well together:

The perspectives that she [facilitator] brought [to the visits] were maybe similar to the readings ... they're not perspectives that we would think of, but this different voice opened our eyes to what was happening and why it was happening. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The visits of the community facilitator and the atelierista are a great initiative, and I felt they represented the link between the centre and the discussions at the learning circle. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I could see [the Community Facilitator's] skills in action [during the visits], and we could talk about the readings in the learning circle. (Educator, Victoria)

The visits support the process of what we're talking about [in the learning circles] considerably. (Educator, Victoria)

Communication Between Visits

Between visits to the centres, and following each learning circle, community facilitators often communicated with educators via e-mail. These communications often featured the facilitators' summary and reflections about the visits and/or the learning circles. In addition, educators often e-mailed their pedagogical documentations with the community facilitators, who then shared their thoughts with the educators and additional relevant readings. Community facilitators usually shared their e-mails with each other, and with the project co-director and the evaluator.

The community facilitators invested considerable time and energy into this ongoing communication, and generally benefited from that investment, though they sometimes wondered about whether the educators found similar benefits from these exchanges:

I found it to be effective to communicate by e-mail in between visits and used e-mail to share reflections on my previous visits, to make suggestions for extensions to explorations ... and to reflect on any documentation that I had received from educators. While I did get some responses from educators at times, it was sometimes frustrating to spend long periods of time crafting a thoughtful e-mail and often times not get any response. ... I also felt at times some momentum was lost in between visits, perhaps partly due to the relative lack of engagement with the e-mails in between visits. (Community Facilitator, Coquitlam)

The emails were very useful to me to clarify my thinking on how to provoke or extend what I saw in the visits. Some educators were very responsive to the emails and it seemed to extend their thinking as well. But they were in the minority, most didn't respond through email or verbally so I was unsure as to whether the emails were read and/or useful. I will be very interested to hear what the educators thought. [The other Community Facilitator] and I copied one another on these emails and that was very helpful. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

Based on comments provided by the educators, it would appear that lack of time, rather than lack of engagement per se, was the primary factor limiting educators' involvement in ongoing communication between visits and learning circles. For example:

The e-mails ... [haven't] yet taken off as a means of further communication between meetings and visits. I also know that sometimes it was overload that caused some not to respond. (Educator, Victoria)

Sometimes I did not have enough time to respond to all the e-mails, and I wish I could do that more often. (Educator, Victoria)

In general, however, educators seemed to value the ongoing e-mail communication from the community facilitators, whether they responded to it or not:

I think the communication between visits was very valuable, we could set up a relationship getting to know each other. Also, from the perspective of [the Community Facilitator and the evaluator], you could know the situation we were working in, and so it gives more depth and understanding on both sides. (Educator, Victoria)

I greatly enjoyed communication by e-mail with all the participants. (Educator, Victoria)

I liked that I had ongoing support from the facilitator through e-mails. She was very responsive to any e-mails and in providing us with useful articles and information. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I appreciated reading the articles offered in between the visits and the learning circles. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Having assistance [via email] in finding new articles and ideas that would further our practice was helpful. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Challenges

This was the first year of a pilot project. The Community Facilitator position itself was new to BC, both facilitators were new to their jobs, and both were called upon to collaborate with educators in bringing the project goals to life within the particular, and highly diverse, conditions, at the participating centres. These factors presented unique opportunities—and challenges—to educators and community facilitators alike. As noted by one community facilitator:

There is no job description, no model, no guidelines to reference, and I worked alone. So while the lack of guidelines allowed for flexibility, creativity, and independence, which I loved, it also meant there was uncertainty. I was in question about how much to provoke educators, and uncertain as to what I should actually do while on site ... Even while this uncertainty was challenging, I still appreciated the opportunity to create the job and follow my own intuition. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

In the initial months of the project, when the uncertainty was greatest for educators and community facilitators, considerable effort needed to be invested in building trusting relationships before any substantial efforts to introduce changes in practice could even be contemplated. As noted by both community facilitators:

While in the centres I [sometimes] found it hard to ask the deeper questions, or engage in more thoughtful dialogue. ... I was focusing on building relationships of trust with the educators, and felt by constantly asking “probing questions” I might just be annoying. ... (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

... there was a definite discomfort in most of the centres with my presence, particularly in the beginning when relationships had not yet been established. There was perhaps the thought that judgment of “best/right” practice would occur. It has been slow for the centres to open up to my presence. (Community Facilitator, Coquitlam)

These perspectives are echoed in the comments of a number of educators, reflecting back on the evolution of the visits over the course of the project:

I think at the beginning we weren't really sure how to go with it or how it was going to happen. (Educator, Victoria)

I have to be honest and say I was a little overwhelmed at the beginning of this project, in that I didn't know exactly what it was all about. (Educator, Victoria)

The role of the Community Facilitator visiting the centre is not well defined. ... It was hard to see from the beginning how [the Community Facilitator] would/could support our team in a practical sense and what our roles would be in being involved in this type of project. ... towards the middle to end of the term, we saw our relationship with her evolve where we were all comfortable in the role we found ourselves in and welcomed her reflections. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Another challenge raised by some educators was the perceived pressure to have “something to show” the community facilitators when they visited their centre. The following comments capture, on the one hand, the pressure felt by some project participants to do something “special” during the visits; and, on the other hand, the tensions experienced by community facilitators in trying to strike a balance between supporting educators to try new approaches while supporting everyday practice:

When [the community facilitator] was coming, it was like, what are you going to do? ... it wasn't like “showtime” but it was ... like “well she's here, she's coming, we should be doing something, we should be documenting what we see, or whatever.” ... It's like ... when you have a visitor coming and you want them to see everyone on their best behaviour or doing something really neat, because that's what they're going to take away with them. (Educator, Victoria)

I don't always want it to be an “event” [when I visit] ... I want to be there for regular practice. On the one hand, I was sort of wanting them to plan something for when I was there, so that I could assist with it or observe it, but on the other hand, I don't want to create pressure. But I felt like I had to say, “I'm coming at such-and-such a time, so if there's anything you want me to help with, let me know”... but to do that without creating pressure. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

During their visits, the community facilitators often introduced new materials to the centres and helped to set up provocations designed to engage children in working with

materials in novel ways, such as foot painting on a canvas on the floor, splatter painting, mixing clay with water, playing with sand on the floor, and so on. Some of these activities were new to the centres, and many were easier to carry out with the facilitators' presence, because the facilitator was able to help in coordinating and cleaning up the activity. Children were sometimes quite excited about engaging in these activities, partly because they were not formerly part of the centres' regularly scheduled or permitted activities.

However, neither the novelty of the materials and the activities, nor their likely by-products (i.e., a mess to clean up) were the primary purpose of the visits. Sometimes new, high quality materials, novel activities, and the permission to make a mess can create conditions that promote exploration, that provide an opening for children and educators to begin engaging in longer-term, inquiry-based learning, experimentation, and documentation. It is this form of deep and ongoing engagement with practice, whether with new materials and activities or well established ones, that the visits to the centres are ultimately intended to support. Some educators commented that as they came to understand this, the pressure to "do something special" relaxed.

Future Directions

In discussing ways the experience of the centre visits could be enhanced in future deliveries of the project, participants made the following suggestions:

- Longer and/or more frequent visits from the community facilitator;
- Greater involvement/availability of an atelierista;
- A blog or website where participants could post and discuss their experiences and explorations with others throughout the project;
- Greater opportunities for visits between sites (e.g., for community facilitators and/or educators from the two sites to meet face to face and/or visit centres in each other's communities).

The Project as a Whole

Educators were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project as a whole, to describe the main challenges associated with the implementation of this model, and to make suggestions on how the model might be improved.

General Perceptions

All participating educators considered the pilot project to be a useful model of professional development for the child care field, and all would be interested in participating in such a model in the future, though some educators expressed reservations about the time commitment involved in participating. Many educators expressed the desire to see the model extended to more early learning centres in more BC communities. The following comments capture perspectives offered by many educators who participated in the project:

I believe this project to be a great model of professional development. It was a great way to learn from professionals and to have on-site, practical training. Learning from school or in a book can only take you so far, especially when it comes to ensuring that educators and programs evolve. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I believe the project is very useful as a model and as a means of support. There are many educators that are still approaching early care and learning with outdated approaches. ... I wonder how it can be made more available to more caregivers who really need support and to update their methods? (Educator, Coquitlam)

Participating in this project is a huge opportunity to be involved in an innovative professional development model and for staying abreast of what is current in the field. I believe it has the power to educate, transform and rejuvenate as well as update the beliefs and practices of all early childhood educators in the province in ways that go beyond the training of many educators, especially those whose formal training was several years ago like mine was. (Educator, Victoria)

When asked about the most and least valuable aspects of the project, some educators expressed that the learning circles or the centre visits were most valuable, or that project e-mails or readings were of least value. However, most educators commented on the importance of all project components working together. For example:

I found the visits by the pedagogical facilitator the most helpful, but I really believe that the success of the experience for me lies within the interconnectedness of the various components. I have tried to envision what it would be like to only have had one or two of the components and I do not see how the experience could be as rich and transformative as it was for me without *all* the components together. (Educator, Victoria)

I believe there was a strong connection between the visits to the centre, the learning circles, and the readings. I really enjoyed the visits and the readings, because I feel that the readings were my connection with the theories and research work that is done in the field of ECE. I tried to connect the readings to hands-on practices in the centre and talk about possible small steps we take in exploring with the children. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I found the entire process helpful. I found that all components complemented each other and it was the whole process that helped to broaden my perspective and enhance my program. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Challenges / Limitations of the Model

When queried about the limitations of the model and/or about any negative effects of the project, some respondents questioned the readiness or willingness of some educators and/or centres to engage with the model, given the intellectual investment required and the need to be open to alternative views of practice. For instance:

I think it's a good model, but I think ... we just have to be careful we don't put too many people off because they think it will be too academically challenging for them, or at any rate that might be their perception. (Educator, Victoria)

I think [the model] is very useful but I think it depends on the centre and where they're coming from ... I'm thinking back to other centres that I've worked for ... and this would not have sat well. We were very very rigid ... it was all about the curriculum, the teacher, what the parents' expectations were and how to meet them, so... I don't know. (Educator, Victoria)

However, by far the most common limitation cited by participants was the time commitment involved in participating in the project. For example, the community facilitators commented on the difficulty of fulfilling their role effectively within the allotted hours for the project. Also, most educators cited the difficulty of attending a three-hour learning circle at the end of a long day, and of making extra time outside regular work hours to complete pedagogical documentations and complete the project readings. These challenges are reflected in the comments below:

I think having ... time affected my ability to practise what I learned in the project. It would have been great to be able to separate "working" time and "personal" time with this project, as balancing out the two can be challenging for me in general. (Educator, Victoria)

The time is the one thing that affected me. The project makes me feel busier than before because I tried to do and write more. I am willing to do more work to improve my skills and abilities, but on the other hand, feel stressful when I am tired. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The only issue that affected my ability to practice what I learned was time. With my two part-time jobs ... every weeknight after a 14-hour day I did not have as much time or energy as I would have liked to complete as many pedagogical narrations as I wanted to. ... On the learning circle days I was on-the-go from 5 a.m. through to close to midnight, totaling 19 hours. (Educator, Victoria)

On a related note, while participants did get credit for professional development from the ECE Registry for participating in the project, they received no additional financial

compensation for the time spent. This lack of compensation, in a field that is under-resourced and underpaid, may sometimes have contributed to a feeling of not being valued as professionals. The responses below capture a continuum of perspectives on this issue:

If you can find a way of supporting the time commitment for ECEs, this is a very useful way of supporting quality care for children and families. (Educator, Victoria)

Workload was much greater than before (many more individual pedagogical documentations, readings, and time spent on attending meetings). ... there was no additional compensation (salary) for the huge effort put in this year. (Educator, Coquitlam)

My ... teachers were hesitant, as this sounded like too much work and one questioned whether I would pay for additional time spent working towards any of the work required for participation. This caused some tension at the start of the year. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Educators bring a great deal of experience to their practice and I felt a bit defensive at the beginning ... that we should be more valued as professionals to begin with. (Educator, Victoria)

While it is beyond the scope of this pilot project to address these systemic challenges, it is important to document them because they may be significant contextual barriers to recruiting new participants to the project and to realizing the full potential of the model, despite its intrinsic promise. In the words of one community facilitator:

Through my experience in this project ... I see educators wanting to expand their thinking, their knowledges, to collaborate with other educators in a meaningful way, but who do not have the resources or opportunities to do so. The barriers of lack of resources, low wages, and no paid time for collaborating with colleagues or to do pedagogical narrations, competing stresses of high staff turnover, lack of support for children with challenging behaviours, lack of confidence to challenge the status quo, perceived sanctions from parents and licensing, no managerial support, all combine to make changes extremely difficult. Many of these barriers directly contributed to participant withdrawal from the project [in Victoria], and all of these [barriers] contribute to quality care. These barriers certainly impacted many of the educators in the project as well. So, while this project offers the support and resources for ECEs, other factors undermine what can be accomplished. (Community Facilitator, Victoria)

Future Directions

In discussing ways the project as a whole might be strengthened in future deliveries, participants made the following general suggestions:

- Finding ways to better compensate educators for their time commitment to the project (discussed extensively above);
- Providing opportunities for greater family involvement (e.g., parent meetings, updates on the research on the project);
- Extending the project to more centres and/or more communities across the province.

Project Outcomes

This section of the evaluation describes the main outcomes of the project: how the project changed participants' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; their relationships with colleagues, children, and families; and the nature and quality of the programs they provide. These outcomes are described primarily from the perspectives of the educators themselves. Where relevant, the comments of participating families are provided as well.

In describing the project outcomes in general, all the educators who participated in the project felt that the project had changed their practice in some respects. Moreover, all educators believed that the changes introduced in the project would have a lasting impact on their practice.

Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

Increased Knowledge

Project readings and discussions focused on a variety of theories and issues of interest to the contemporary early years field. Relevant theories included feminism, post-structuralism, and post-humanism. In addition, educators were encouraged to become aware of the theoretical orientations that underlie child care curricula and environments. Topics that were introduced throughout the project included the image of the child, the child care environment, materials and materiality, the child and the early childhood educator as researchers, art as inquiry, gender bias, social equity, and social justice.

Numerous educators noted that the project had expanded their knowledge of these contemporary issues and practices within the early years field, and some educators commented upon their increased ability to draw on this knowledge in practice. For example:

I feel more knowledgeable from reading thought-provoking articles and dialoguing with educators from different child care facilities. (Educator, Coquitlam)

My mind has been broadened to accept new ideas and concepts. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think [the project] has increased my knowledge on how to introduce open ended and experimental experiences for the children. It has taken the fear out of what might be chaotic situations and has made me realize that it's always worth a try. (Educator, Victoria)

[The] new growth in my knowledge has been a key factor in providing me with information and perspectives that provoked me to make the shifts that I have made and enabled me to engage more deeply and

thoughtfully in conversation about these topics and issues, concepts and ideas with the adults and children who come into the centre, as well as with my colleagues and people outside of my work environment.
(Educator, Victoria)

Of course, with increased knowledge often comes a degree of insecurity, but this insecurity sometimes served as the basis for new aspirations and a commitment to lifelong learning, as expressed in the following quotes:

[The project] has certainly made me aware of my limitations and how much more I would like to be able to achieve. So perhaps I'm feeling less competent, but more aware. (Educator, Victoria)

[The project] makes you realize you never know it all. Learning is ongoing, no matter how long you've been in the profession. ... I keep my mind open to different findings. (Educator, Victoria)

Pedagogical Documentation

Pedagogical documentation is a critical skill for contemporary educators: it provides them with a means of engaging critically with practice, a way of researching children's learning, and a means of focusing collaborative discussions with colleagues, all of which, in turn, help to transform everyday practice on an ongoing basis. Pedagogical documentation is also key to the effective implementation of the *BC Early Learning Framework* in early years centres across the province.

In describing skills and competencies acquired in the course of the project, many educators noted that they had either learned to produce pedagogical documentations for the first time, or that they had refined their skills in this respect. For example:

Pedagogical documentation was new to me. It was not a part of my formal college training. I had completed only one narration prior to my involvement with the project after attending a presentation on the *BC Columbia Early Learning Framework*. I found it nearly impossible to continue doing pedagogical documentation, as it was not supported in the setting in which I worked at that time. Until the project I felt that I did not have enough knowledge about the "how" and the "why" of the process and practice of pedagogical documentation. ... Now, I have experienced first hand the value of [putting] pedagogical documentation at the forefront of the early learning environment in which I work.
(Educator, Victoria)

These learning stories are different from the ones we did before the project ... I guess for the last few years now we have tried to take photographs and write down what was happening, [but] less so the [children's] conversations and more the general "what was going on" ... so this, I would say, is more in depth. (Educator, Victoria)

Through learning circles, I have seen and read many pedagogical documentations and learned how to write a better documentation relating to the *BC Early Learning Framework*. (Educator, Coquitlam)

[The project] helped me with the reflective writing in my pedagogical documentations. I often struggled to reflect on the explorations because I was trying to be objective or informative for the parents. I used to heavily emphasize the children's learning. I realized, however, that it is also important to reflect on my learning as I am learning together with the children. ... It became very natural to engage in reflective writing and to share with others without worrying about being judged. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Moreover, many educators noted specific skills they had developed throughout the project that supported them to produce better pedagogical documentations, such as the ability to cite relevant literature and/or take photographs:

I had never used a digital camera before ... I'm finding I am really enjoying taking photos and challenging myself to capture things and look back at angles and hands and body movements ... and materials and agency and all those new concepts. (Educator, Victoria)

I've ... become better at finding sources ... to back up pedagogical narrations through the articles [the pedagogical facilitator] sent. I've also become a better photographer. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I am more open and flexible, I read more articles, I look differently at doing documentations, and my skills at taking pictures are now really amazing – I think before I do it. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Critical Reflection

Of all the changes reported by educators who participated in the project, the development of a critical, reflective perspective on practice was the one cited most frequently. Many educators referred to the deepening of their critical stance as the most important change introduced by the project. Moreover, most of the reported changes that are documented throughout this report, such as changes in relationships with children, colleagues, and families, and changes to practice, are directly related to the deepening of critical reflection among the educators.

For many participants, the development of a more critical stance began in the learning circles, but eventually began to be manifested in day-to-day practice in the centres. The following comments capture a range of perspectives on the development of a critical, reflective orientation to practice:

The most important thing [the project] taught me is how to reflect critically on my practice. ... Before, we were of course documenting our children's projects, but we never had the habit of discussing it, or questioning it, or asking "why did you do that, why did you ask that question?" That was something really new to me and I really liked it. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Being in the project has re-ignited my creativity and has me demanding of myself to constantly re-think, critically reflect upon, and question everything that I say and do in relation to my expanding knowledge of the presented concepts and ideas. (Educator, Victoria)

I guess it has pushed me, pushed me beyond the envelope, pushed me to see things in a different way, for example through questioning the reasoning on why we do things a certain way ... just because that's how we've always done [things] doesn't mean that it's the best way or the only way. (Educator, Victoria)

The project has allowed me to challenge my previous beliefs and practices by questioning where they came from. ... These changes have been evident in my daily practices with children, educators, and my personal life. I am able to question and therefore gain multiple perspectives. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I became more open-minded and non-judgmental ... because I learned that there are different perspectives and there is never a right way. I also feel more creative when provoking children's play and exploration, because I engage in deeper reflection. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Professional Pride

For most participating educators, the project reinforced a belief in the importance of Early Childhood Education as a profession.

While the educators in the project were at different stages of their career (e.g., a few mentioned that they were approaching retirement), all educators in the project intend to remain in the field, and several educators expressed an interest in furthering their investment in the profession through increased advocacy and by attending more workshops and/or pursuing post-secondary education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The comments below are representative of several made by educators in the project:

I love being an Early Childhood Educator. It is a big part of my identity. I want to continue to learn and grow, and I believe any support or challenge can help do that. This project also showed me that there are many wonderful educators who have very similar goals and desires. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The project has broadened my understanding of the field of Early Childhood Education. I feel like I am a member of a professional community of people and I feel privileged to have been a part of the project. (Educator, Victoria)

Since I began my ECE journey, I have always felt it to be an important job. I now realize the importance of coming across as a knowledgeable professional to help to encourage parents and others to value us as we should be valued. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Now I identify myself as an educator doing a very important job. ... I'm not only an educator, I'm a careful observer of children, a documenter, a listener, a researcher, I partner with parents, I'm a facilitator of learning. ... I realize I'm doing something important and I won't let anybody look down on me. So that's how the project affected my view of my work and my job. (Educator, Coquitlam)

My future plans include furthering my education. The project reinforced this desire because I feel even more proud of the groups of people that make up this field and really want to work hard to represent us educators in a highly regarded light. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I am considering applying for a Master's program ... with the following areas of interest: diversity, social justice, and gender roles. (Educator, Victoria)

On a related note, one educator in the project made a presentation about her experience of the project at the 2012 conference of the Early Childhood Educators of BC. Finally, several educators from the project were inspired to participate in the conference, *International Innovations in ECE: A Canadian Forum on Early Childhood Frameworks*, held in July 2012 at the University of Victoria. These activities are a further example of how the project has enhanced educators' professional commitment to the field of Early Childhood Education.

Relationships

The field of Early Childhood Education is fundamentally grounded in relationships. The changes in attitude and practice that resulted from the educators' participation in the project were negotiated through, and expressed in, relationships, whether with colleagues, children, and/or families. Educators reported significant changes in their relationships over the course of the project, especially their relationships with co-workers and with children in their centres. In some cases, families who participated in this evaluation also noted changes in their relationships with the educators and with their own children.

Relationships with Colleagues

All but four of the 23 educators who participated in the project work as part of teams in their centres. For these educators, participation in the project launched a process of change that initially created tensions as the educators struggled with new ideas, questioned various aspects of their practice, and tested new approaches. Several comments attest to the initial tensions in the educators' relationships with one another. For example:

There were a lot of debates, and we all had our different comfort levels, and [ideas about] what was the right way to do things, but I think [coming to the learning circles] helped us work through those issues. (Educator, Coquitlam)

At first, I felt tension, and I think there was a lot of apprehension on some people's parts, but I think the lines of communication have opened somewhat and we know we're all supporting each other on this project ... not everyone feels the same way about it, but we're able to open up to new topics. (Educator, Victoria)

These tensions, while personally difficult for some, were essential to the educators' becoming increasingly engaged with the project and to their learning to communicate with one another in new ways. Nearly all the participating educators stated that the project reported improved relationships at their centre as a consequence of participating in the project. Benefits included increased trust, communication, and collaboration; greater capacity to negotiate and explore new ideas and practices together; and greater tolerance for differences in opinion and philosophy. The comments below capture many of these shifts:

[The project] improved our communication style, as we became more open to one another. We also communicate more frequently throughout the day. It is nice to acknowledge differences and not have to try and agree on everything. We enjoy different perspectives and celebrate our differences. We became more trusting as well, knowing that our different views are not personal. We became a stronger team! (Educator, Coquitlam)

There has been a considerable change in communication and trust within [our program]. The educators now set up regular times to meet and discuss observations and documentation. They work together on projects, discuss their vision, and are able to question each other's practices without judgment. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I found that we became more curious, and wondered more often, also asked each other questions ... We shared more stories with each other of what we noticed, and it strengthened our relationship. (Educator, Victoria)

[The project] has been a tool to support understanding of our philosophy and consistency within the centre and to take us to a new level of practice. ... Some, who avoided taking risks or hung on to control, are relaxing and trying new ways. Some, who avoided any expression of conflict, are voicing views that differ from others. I welcome this openness and believe it builds deeper relationships within our centre. (Educator, Victoria)

Some educators who work alone in their programs, but in a larger context (e.g., schools in the case of the StrongStart centres who participated in the project) have noted that participation in the project has changed their relationships with their partners in these settings (e.g., kindergarten and other primary grade teachers), possibly setting the stage for change beyond the centres themselves. Similarly, StrongStart facilitators who participated in the project were able to share their experiences of the project with StrongStart facilitators and coordinators in other settings. One StrongStart facilitator in the project speaks to this experience as follows:

Overall, I believe that my involvement in the project has led to changes that I have made in the centre being of interest to some of my colleagues and that the centre is seen by some of them as inspirational. It has provided us with an avenue to discuss practice. I feel that there has been a heightened regard for the program by some of my colleagues since my participation in the project. (Educator, Victoria)

Relationships with Children

Image of the Child

Educators' image of the child strongly influences the nature of their relationship with children, either opening up or limiting children's opportunities to learn. Many people unconsciously hold an image of the child as weak, limited in ability, and in need of protection, or view childhood primarily as a stage on the way to becoming an adult. Even people who do not hold such views may never have taken the opportunity to articulate their image of the child.

Most Early Childhood Educators enter the profession out of a deep interest in children, and most hold positive views of children's capacity to learn. Thus, many educators stated that the project had either confirmed or strengthened their image of the child, rather than changing it per se, as expressed in the following comments:

I have always believed that children learn through their bodies and experiences. I believe that if children are given the time and space and are listened to, that they are able to construct an immeasurable amount of knowledge. The project has confirmed this for me. (Educator, Coquitlam)

My view of children has been reinforced ... they are active, capable, and critical learners. They are active researchers of their own knowledge. (Educator, Coquitlam)

[The project] strengthened my belief in children as active learners and co-constructors of knowledge. (Educator, Victoria)

I'm not sure that [my image of the child] has changed but rather strengthened and evolved. Children not only have their own interests and ideas but their own theories and strategies of inquiry. (Educator, Victoria)

However, several educators noted that aspects of their image of the child had shifted over the course of the project, particularly their view of children as active co-constructors of knowledge. For instance:

Before I always felt children's knowledge was kind of limited, and we are the ones who present the knowledge to them ... I've found it interesting to turn that around and to think about how much they really do know. And I think the project has helped me to understand ... and to respect their capabilities and ideas. (Educator, Victoria)

The project helped me ... unlearn the image of a child that needs to be told what and how and why ... and helped me relearn that a child can perform higher than our expectation. (Educator, Coquitlam)

[The project] has challenged some of the developmental theory I was trained in. (Educator, Victoria)

It was not a long or difficult shift for me ... to view children as capable. What was new for me is the idea that children co-construct knowledge actively ... I had not yet viewed children as natural researchers of their world, which is a much broader view of capability than mainly seeing children as I once did: as people first, who are learning skills through play and who are capable developmentally. (Educator, Victoria)

Interactions with Children

All the educators in the project cited some degree of change in their relationships with the children in their program. Many educators remarked that the project had encouraged them to listen more to children—not so much in an effort to be caring, but so as to better attune themselves to the children's ideas, theories, and intentions. This attunement, in turn, allowed educators to respond more meaningfully to children's thoughts, and to make their learning more visible in the centres, whether by displaying children's work and/or by documenting what the children were doing and saying. This visibility could then serve, for children and educators alike, as a prompt to actively and enthusiastically engage in collaborative inquiry. The sequence of quotes below illustrates this dynamic process:

[The project] has challenged me to really listen to the children. Taking the time to listen can be so hard and the project has been a great motivator to ... just listen. (Educator, Victoria)

I think I have always been fascinated with watching and listening to children as they “learned through play.” So possibly the project has enhanced my interest in digging a little deeper and trying to understand how the children learn. I felt I could [in the past] be one-sided on how I thought they were interpreting certain experiences. However, listening and asking those key questions, made me realize how much ... children were learning in a variety of different ways. (Educator, Victoria)

I strive more now to ensure that the children’s concepts are being heard. I find that the best way to do this is to showcase the children’s experiences and progress so that it is visible to them that they are noticed and appreciated. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Throughout the year it became more and more evident that the children were able to offer ideas and predictions to questions that they and the educators asked. It has shown me how co-operative the learning experience can be, even with such young children. (Educator, Victoria)

I noticed our children became more independent and busier. They felt more valued and supported, as we actively listened and reflected on their interests and ideas. Children also became more creative and better at problem-solving. They enjoyed facing challenges as their confidence grew. Children started calling their own explorations and discoveries “projects,” which shows us how proud they were of creating their own learning and meaningful experience. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Alongside the increased attention to children’s ideas, theories, and projects, came a greater openness to adapting activities and materials to children’s interests, and to giving children a greater voice in negotiating centre rules and routines:

Now I’m definitely looking at children leading the way, being more open-ended ... I think before I would have thought that wasn’t possible, it would have to be much more formally taught. (Educator, Victoria)

When I am in the program, I am more focused on what the children are doing [and] saying ... and how I can support them, with more openness to them finding solutions rather than me imposing solutions. (Educator, Victoria)

[The project] has provided that push to try new things with the children and let them explore experiences the way that they want to. They have had the

opportunity to try very different things and be part of the decision making on what is presented in the class room. (Educator, Victoria)

Now we're really flexible and we look at [children] as our partners more, and you know, who makes the rules right now? They do. ... Of course we discuss it, we make them reason why we are going to get rid of that rule. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Over time, the changing relationship between educators and children has the potential to transform children's relationships with one another, and to have a material effect on the child care environment. Centres who had participated in the project the longest were most likely to report these larger "ripple effects" in their programs. The following narrative illustrates the organic nature of the changes in the relationships and the child care environment that can occur over time:

A few days ago, I observed a child digging through some large wire on a shelf near the doorway. When she found what she was looking for, she quickly brought that wire to the floor on the other side of the room. She then went to another shelf and brought out animals and shells and placed them on the floor as well. I watched for a few moments as another child came over to talk to her. The other child then ran to another shelf to get some blocks and sat down on the floor where the first child was sitting, and they began to build together. A few months ago, these children would have been told that the materials have special places and that they need to stay in those places. Now, children are moving freely around their environment, deepening their explorations with the materials. Relationships between children and educators have strengthened and are now based on trust. Children are free to make choices, negotiate when needed, and problem-solve when issues arise. Projects are interest-based and researched by both the child and educator together. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Relationships with Families

Educators' Perspectives

Many educators reported positive changes in their relationships with families in their centres as a result of participating in the project. For most participating centres, sharing pedagogical documentations with families was the primary vehicle for these changes. However, the degree to which this information-sharing enhanced relationships differed among the participating centres.

For many educators, the pedagogical documentations served as an additional means of connecting and talking with families. While the ability to connect via the documentations was a positive development, it did not necessarily change the relationships substantially:

I couldn't honestly say [the project] changed my relationship with the families. I always try to establish good relationships ... perhaps we are presenting more learning stories, so there's more for them to see and read. (Educator, Victoria)

I hope [relationships with families] were enhanced because of the support we had with creating documentations and the families [being] able to read and respond to the documentations. ... We had many positive comments but did not really get a dialogue going as much as we hoped. (Educator, Victoria)

Presenting the learning stories, and pushing myself to present these "learning stories" helped my connection with the families more. It was a helpful way to reconnect with parents and show them a story, or invite them to see what pictures I took of their child. (Educator, Victoria)

Because we challenged ourselves to produce pedagogical documentations on every child and ask for the parents' perspective in response, we strengthened our relationships with our community. We also learned to accept that not all families will respond or will show their acknowledgment in a variety of ways, such as non-verbal cues or just becoming more comfortable with us. (Educator, Coquitlam)

In some centres, the pedagogical documentations began to serve as catalysts for a deeper dialogue between educators and parents. In these cases, the families became more engaged in the underlying purpose of the documentations, seeing them more as inquiries into children's learning, rather than as stories of what the children were doing in the centre. This understanding then served as a means for families to be more engaged with the educators and with their children's learning. For example:

I had [the Community Facilitator] come in and we had "parent night" ... we had a powerpoint with pedagogical narrations based on the project, and I printed that up as a book ... I've had some really interesting conversations with parents in my preschool, particularly the teachers. I had a dad ... who said "this is amazing ... I had no idea that preschoolers could do inquiry-based learning." ... So, we've had some really good conversations about that. It's opened the door for those conversations and for parents to view children's play in a different way as well. (Educator, Victoria)

The ongoing documentation has strengthened our relationships with our families. They are now involved with the projects and e-mail me regularly to discuss the documentation. ... This dialogue is encouraged and through documentation and dialogue we are working together with our families to share our practices and beliefs and to hear their voices. (Educator, Coquitlam)

My involvement with the project has strengthened and deepened my relationships with families in the program, especially those families who I have talked with more extensively about the ideas and concepts I learned in the project. (Educator, Victoria)

Families' Perspectives

Family participation in the evaluation was fairly limited. While 10 families (five from each of the two sites) indicated willingness to participate in the evaluation, only six ultimately responded to telephone and e-mail contact, possibly because summer holidays were underway by the time the evaluation began. Thus, the comments recorded below, while suggestive in many cases, should not be considered representative of all the families in the project.

Families learned about the project primarily through the educators in the participating centres, who provided oral and written information about the project. Families' impressions about the purpose of the project varied. For example:

We understand it is a research project and it aims to work with the staff, parents, and children in a collaborative manner around programming. (Parent, Coquitlam)

My understanding was that the project was to allow [my child's centre] to share what we are doing ... also to sit with others involved in Early Childhood Education and discuss and share how the teachers teach the program ... and see how the program works with children. (Parent, Coquitlam)

I believe that [the project's intent] is to gain a better understanding of and promote the Reggio Emilia approach used at [my child's centre]. (Parent, Coquitlam)

[The purpose of the project] is the observation of young children when free to explore creative materials. (Parent, Victoria)

[The purpose of the project] is to explore what you're doing and how you can do it differently, and how you can take things deeper and give more opportunity for children to shape what happens. (Parent, Victoria)

As noted above, one of the main ways educators communicated with families throughout the project was through the sharing of pedagogical documentations. Families reported feeling positive about these documentations:

We enjoyed receiving the narration reports very much ... [these reports] help us understand what is going on at day care every day! We appreciate the extra efforts the teachers put into these reports. (Parent, Coquitlam)

I do appreciate that [the centre] really keeps parents informed of what's going on in the classroom—lots of photographs and written information not only posted in the classroom, but sent home via e-mail. (Parent, Coquitlam)

I noticed the photos on the walls along with the stories ... I enjoyed reading them and was inspired by them. (Parent, Victoria)

All six families reported that they were very pleased about the quality of program their children attended at the participating centres. When asked about how the project affected their children's experiences and their relationships with the centre, responses varied. For instance:

[The project] didn't seem to affect [my child's experience]. [He] never mentioned it and was quite overwhelmingly happy at the preschool. It seemed neither positive nor negative. ... I didn't notice any changes [in the centre] beyond the usual changing of the stations and provocations and items on the wall. (Parent, Coquitlam)

[The project] helped us see how our educators really pay attention to the kids' interests and work to make activities relevant to them while teaching them valuable skills. (Parent, Coquitlam)

[The project gave me] an understanding of when to "let go" ... when my child is in a safe environment, give her freedom and the relationship will strengthen. (Parent, Victoria)

I think [the project] highlighted the assumptions that I carried. That's one of the huge things I learned ... when you start to give [children] these kinds of freedoms [to explore materials] the opportunities for learning increase because [the children] start to articulate ... they start to say, "well I want to know what happens to the clay if I put it in water [and so on] ... [my son] has learned as a four-year-old that he can just say "this is what I want to do ... and he can be supported in that learning. (Parent, Victoria)

Overall, the families who reported the deepest level of engagement and transformation from the project were those who attended a drop-in program, where the programming necessarily involves greater parental engagement. These parents witnessed the changes introduced by the project first-hand, and discussed the ideas of the project in depth with the educator. These parents described profound shifts in their relationships with their children and in their understanding of their children's play and learning as a result of their connection to the project. While it may be more challenging to involve parents to this extent in other child care centres, the experiences of these parents do, nonetheless, suggest the project's potential to transform relationships with families. To realize this potential more broadly, however, it may be necessary to invest more time in communicating with parents in greater depth about the project throughout its duration.

Program/Curriculum

Quality

Educators were asked whether they believed the quality of their child care program had changed as a result of the project. Responses to this question varied. Some educators were uncertain as to whether the quality of the program offered by their centres had changed, referring to it as a “work in progress.” Others expressed the view that they had offered a high quality program before the project, and that, in this sense, the quality hadn’t changed much. For instance:

I don’t think the quality has changed, but the program became more flexible and enthusiastic. We put more reflective thought into our programming rather than setting up in the same way every day. (Educator, Coquitlam)

The project may have enhanced the quality of our program subtly through our practice of deeper reflection and allowing us the opportunity to experiment with new ideas. (Educator, Coquitlam)

[The quality] didn’t really change ... I’m just trying to be more open, less rigid, and take my cues from the children, or at least try to take them from the children more than from my own personal agenda. (Educator, Victoria)

However, most participants in the project perceived the project to have changed the quality of the program they offered substantially, and most considered these changes to be improvements. The following comments are a representative sample of these perspectives:

I believe that since being a part of the project that the children and families are experiencing a physically more appealing and inviting environment with materials set daily in creative provocations that inspire richer encounters and experiences ... often resulting in deepened relationships with themselves, the adult who brought them to [the program], the materials, and me. (Educator, Victoria)

I think that we both individually and as a preschool are really thinking about the activities we present to children, and also the ways that we do things. I think we’re changing a lot of the things, or questioning, why we are doing it ... I think that that definitely has changed our program. It’s really kept us thinking continuously (Educator, Victoria)

I have seen considerable change in the quality of child care being practised in [our centre]. The children are able to explore their environment without limitations or time restraints. We see fewer behaviours and more independence on a daily basis. The children have the skills to solve problems and make decisions for themselves. The children are now seen as

people of today and are valued for their uniqueness and interests. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I think [the project] has improved my program in the sense that I now have a clearer vision and want to strive to improve. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Materials

All participating centres were introduced to new materials by the community facilitators during their visits. Materials introduced included clay, wire, string, sand, and paint. Over time, some centres eliminated or de-emphasized the use of “traditional” plastic toys in favour of natural materials. In commenting on changes introduced by the project, several educators commented on the use of new and/or natural materials. For example:

We started introducing some of those new ideas, new materials, like clay or wire, things more connected to nature –we go for nature walks, we collect natural materials. (Educator, Coquitlam)

We were introduced to some new ideas ... such as experimenting with sand on the floor. This became a part of our classroom [for a couple of months]. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Children engage with natural materials more than before, and this experience gives the children another window to see the world. (Educator, Coquitlam)

Some educators also began to introduce “real” materials—for example, mallets and other tools the children asked for in exploring their projects, instead of “pretend” plastic tools and equipment. One educator commented on her decision to use breakable dishes for children’s snacks, instead of continuing to use plastic or disposable utensils:

Upon reflecting about how children notice aesthetics, and to test my theory that children will instinctively use care when handling fragile items, I decided to purchase china plates for each child to use for their snack foods and glass pitchers for the children to pour their own water. (Educator, Victoria)

Along with introducing new materials, the community facilitators and the educators often worked together to create “provocations,” novel presentations of materials designed to encourage the children to engage with the materials in new ways. Many educators commented on these provocations, and on their own greater flexibility in allowing children—and sometimes, themselves—to explore materials in ways that would not have been considered, encouraged, or even permitted before their participation in the project:

Provocations were sometimes set to deliberately provoke surprise. Provocations were also set up to extend and build upon ways I had seen the children and adults using the materials. .Art provocations were sometimes set with the hope ... [that] the adults [would be] drawn to engage with the materials that “spoke” to them. (Educator, Victoria)

Through a variety of experiences, children explored with all their senses (e.g., a light room, clay with water, clay on the floor, etc.). These experiences inspired me to try new things that were not tried before—for example, introducing clay in a variety of ways. (Educator, Victoria)

[The children are] allowed more flexibility in their use of materials ... for me, this has required being less rigid and less uptight about they can and cannot do, or should and should not do, within the parameters of the room and my comfort level as well. (Educator, Victoria)

We experimented with a string project near the end of the year. This began based on observing the actions of one child which inspired us and the children to create an amazing web. This project lasted a few weeks, took over an entire room, and transcended our preschool program to involve our school-age program as well. It was on a scale and level that was outside my initial comfort zone, but was quickly embraced by all the children and teachers. (Educator, Coquitlam)

I have had the opportunity to watch the children find their own ways of dealing with problems, working with materials and how they use different things. After using clay on the floor and seeing how they used it we talked about doing it again with music. That proved to be a very different experience than their first encounter with clay on the floor which was very interesting to see. It turned into more of a ballet dancing experience with the music. (Educator, Victoria)

As will be seen below, for many educators, allowing children to use materials in new and unexpected ways served as a catalyst for questioning the use of space and time in their centres.

The Early Years Environment

In the course of the project, many educators had the opportunity to consider the role of the child care environment as the “third teacher,” as actively shaping the nature of the activities and explorations that occur—or not—in a given environment.

Community facilitators in Victoria and Coquitlam worked with educators to make changes in the environment to make materials more accessible to children and to encourage creative exploration.

For example, the community facilitator in Coquitlam assisted educators in two centres to create mini-ateliers to make art materials more accessible and inviting to children. In Victoria, the community facilitator assisted one educator to reorganize the room to create better flow between play areas and to provide more space for children's artistic explorations. In the latter location, the educator also completely transformed the wall space in the centre, removing commercially produced posters on children's development to make space for pedagogical documentations and for children's work. In all participating centres, wall space was used to display pedagogical documentations. In many locations, space was given over, sometimes for weeks at a time, to better accommodate children's long-term projects. Also, some educators are taking more opportunities to explore the natural environment around their centres.

Finally, as noted above, in many centres, allowing children to engage with materials in unexpected ways prompted educators to reflect and, in some cases, to dramatically transform, the child care environment. For instance:

I am now in the practice of constantly looking at and re-looking at the early learning environment in which I work and taking steps to re-define and re-design it as it evolves and transforms into a community space of beauty where the children and families can encounter and engage with provocations, both inter-acting and intra-acting with the materials.
(Educator, Victoria)

[The children] have more opportunities to explore new materials. We have a new approach to building ... before, they did building in the nap room and the main room, but never outside. Now we take our building blocks, or whatever they want to build with, outside [in the centre's play area]. So now we have that huge space, indoors and outdoors. So the door is always open, they are free to wander around to go outside, to come inside.
(Educator, Coquitlam)

Centre Rules and Routines

All educators reported greater flexibility in their daily schedules and associated rules and routines than before the project, though to differing degrees. Some educators indicated that they were less rigid about their schedules and routines, while others noted that they had done away with their schedules altogether. Educators cited a variety of factors that stimulated reflection on these issues.

For example, just as children's use of materials sometimes prompted educators to open up the child care environment to make space for exploration, so, too, did children's engagement with materials provoke educators to reflect on the use of time in the centres. As one educator noted:

Watching children being engaged in the clay and water experience inspired reflection about time—how important it is to have plenty of time

when children engage with materials ... they seemed to bond, and their interaction was so fluid! (Educator, Victoria)

Some educators began to reflect on their underlying assumptions about children's presumed need for structure and routine, and to consider that, often, pre-set schedules and routines restrict, rather than enable, children's opportunities to learn. Below are some of the reflections that inspired two educators to loosen up—or eliminate—their pre-set schedules:

The project made me question a lot of the things I do and why I do them. ... So with something like schedules ... I've questioned a lot of that this year and ... made some shifts in my philosophy around what the program was there for, and whose needs I was trying to meet. ... I realized a lot of it was done for appearance, trying to give parents what I thought they wanted in a preschool program ... there was sometimes a disconnect between that and what I felt was best for the children's needs. (Educator, Victoria)

My involvement in the project challenged me to look at the ... program and gave me the last gentle "push" I needed to de-clock the routine. My previous training and work experiences valued a traditional, by-the-clock, consistent daily schedule that included a number of interruptions in the children's play. ... I now understand the value in the children having long, uninterrupted lengths of time to delve more deeply into their play, building and strengthening their relationships, and co-constructing knowledge with others and the materials. The children's play is not stopped to have songs, stories or snack [in a] large group. (Educator, Victoria)

Educators at some centres noted that children now have a greater voice in negotiating centre rules and routines. Finally, one educator commented on an initiative she is undertaking in her centre to reduce some rules and structures that had insinuated themselves over the years, bringing the centre into greater alignment with its own long-established philosophy:

I have introduced our own "Pilot Project" for the Summer Program. It is a focus on a flow to transitions and making them more child-friendly. This means no line-ups, no sitting and listening to long instructions, no sitting on the stairs waiting for the rest of the children to tidy up before moving to the next aspect of the program. ... Personally, I think it will make everyone's job easier and it is the way the school once handled transitions. The change to more structure, lineups was gradual. (Educator, Victoria)

Summary and Recommendations

The findings reported throughout this evaluate suggest that the first year of the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Program was highly successful.

The project has strengthened the knowledge, skills, and overall professional orientation of the participating educators. All educators report that that they now adopt a more critical and reflective orientation to their practice, one which allows them to be more open to multiple perspectives and more flexible in their thinking about children and the programs they deliver. They are better able to document children's learning and to connect their documentations to key literature in the field, including *the BC Early Learning Framework*. Educators are more knowledgeable about contemporary theories and research about early years practice, and feel renewed in their commitment to the field.

The project has strengthened educators' image of the child as a strong and capable learner. Moreover, the project has provided educators with resources to realize that image of child in greater depth than before. Educators are more confident in children's abilities, more attentive to their ideas, more open to providing them with opportunities to engage in exploration and to giving them a greater voice in the day-to-day design and delivery of their programs. Educators' improved relationships with one another have been instrumental in fostering the changes in their relationships with children. Educators communicate more often about children's learning and about new ideas, and are able to use their differences as opportunities to explore practice together in creative ways. Relationships with families have also been enhanced, though in most centres, the potential to work collaboratively with families may not yet have been fully realized.

Most centres have made significant shifts in practice throughout the project. New materials have been introduced to the centres and have been presented to the children in a variety of ways, affording children with opportunities to engage in inquiry-based learning. Many educators have made changes in the environment to provide a more attractive space for children and one that allows them to explore materials and projects more freely. Centres have become more flexible in their rules and routines, and some centres have dispensed with pre-set schedules altogether, opening up opportunities for children to engage in sustained creative inquiry. It is likely that the changes noted above will become even more significant for those centres who are continuing in the pilot project for the second year.

Participants' experiences of the model as a whole and of the project's major activities—the learning circles, the Community Facilitator's visits to the centres, and the communications between visits—are for the most part positive. Moreover, the project has provided professional development opportunities that are unique and that were not previously available to them.

Educators made a variety of suggestions to enhance the delivery of the project . These suggestions, reported earlier in this report and repeated in the table below for convenience, should be considered for the second year of the pilot project and beyond. Some of these suggestions provide the basis for the recommendations below.

Learning Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting meetings in different locations (e.g., at the participating centres, at other project sites, i.e., Coquitlam participants visit Victoria learning circle); • Inviting more guest lecturers (e.g., educators who have been working on a model like this one, authors, experts in the field, etc.) • Incorporating more hands-on and/or outdoor experiences (e.g., playing with clay while talking about clay, being outdoors while talking about nature) • Having fewer readings and more visual/multimedia activities; • Involving more centres from the community.
Centre Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer and/or more frequent visits from the Community Facilitator; • Greater involvement/availability of an atelierista; • A blog or website where participants could post and discuss their experiences and explorations with others throughout the project; • Greater opportunities for visits between sites (e.g., for Community Facilitators and/or educators from the two sites to meet face to face and/or visit centres in each other’s communities).
Model as a Whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding ways to better compensate educators for their time commitment to the project (discussed extensively above); • Providing opportunities for greater family involvement (e.g., parent meetings, updates on the research on the project); • Extending the project to more centres and/or more communities across the province.

Table 1. Educators’ suggestions

During the evaluation, educators and community facilitators alike reported feeling considerable uncertainty at the outset of the project about how it would unfold and about how to fulfill their roles in this process, especially in relation to the visits to the centres. To some extent, this uncertainty is an integral part of the project: there are no set objectives or methods within this model, and the capacity to work creatively and effectively with this flexibility is one of the competencies that the project is intended to foster over time. Also, the process of relationship-building, which is critical to the success of this project and which involves a considerable investment of time and energy at the beginning of the project, necessarily generates some feelings of uncertainty.

However, some sources of uncertainty and discomfort for project participants stem from the inevitable challenges of implementing a complex model for the first time, with no available mentors and few guidelines. To address this challenge, it is important that the project begin to create a body of knowledge and associated resources to support practitioners—community facilitators and educators alike—to engage effectively in the process of ongoing collaborative inquiry in early years settings. In the spirit of the model, it would be most appropriate if the project participants themselves could play a role in developing such resources. Thus, in the second year of the project, community facilitators and educators, along with the project co-directors and the project evaluator,

could collaborate in a conscious, creative inquiry into, and documentation of, the nature of the work the project espouses, and what principles and processes support it. This inquiry would serve to strengthen and deepen the work already begun in the first year of the project, and provide resources that would be helpful to future practitioners as the model is extended to more communities across BC.

In concluding this evaluation, it is also important to state that while the project has achieved considerable success in its first year and holds much promise for the future, a range of factors limit what can be accomplished. Existing funding supports two part-time community facilitators, who experience considerable challenges in carrying out their work with the centres in the available hours. Also, the success of the project depends crucially on the commitment of participating educators. These educators invest significant time and energy in the project over and above their paid work, and who, moreover, work in an important profession that is undervalued in our society, and is thus plagued by low wages and high turnover. While it is beyond the scope of this pilot project to address these larger systemic changes, they are part of the context in which the project unfolds. Further government investment in the project, and continued government efforts to support a high quality child care system, would significantly enhance what this project, and the early years field more generally, can accomplish.

Recommendations

1. Develop a cumulative evaluation of the first two years of the pilot project and use the documentation for the evaluation to develop educational resources for Pedagogical Facilitators, educators, and families who may participate in future deliveries of the project model (see recommendations 2, 3, and 4 below).
2. Document the strategies and processes used by community facilitators in their work with educators, and use this documentation to create (a) a resource that future community facilitators can use to orient themselves to their work; and (b) the foundation for a university-level course and/or series of workshops on the role of the community facilitator in early years practice. As more Community Facilitator positions are created in the future, provide opportunities for ongoing sharing and mentorship between facilitators, both face-to-face and online.
3. Document the strategies and processes used by participating educators in their work with community facilitators, their colleagues, and children, and use this documentation to create an educational resource that community facilitators can use in recruiting new centres to the project and that educators can use when learning to work within this model.
4. Enhance opportunities for meaningful family involvement in the project by hosting a meeting for families at the beginning of the second year of the project, in which: (a) the findings from the first year of the project can be presented; (b) the purpose of the project can be discussed in greater depth; and (c) families can communicate their aspirations for the project in their children's centres. At the

end of the year, conduct a focus group with families, and use this information (a) as part of the cumulative evaluation of the project and (b) as the basis for an educational resource for families who participate in this project in the future.

5. Within the funding available for the second year of the project, support community facilitators to work more intensively with a smaller number of early years centres, allowing for longer and/or or more frequent visits to the participating centres. Also, provide support for community facilitators to visit each other's sites periodically, so they can share creative practices and lessons learned throughout the project.
6. Create a secure online space where community facilitators and interested educators in the project site communities can post and access relevant literature and share and discuss pedagogical documentations with one another throughout the project.

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Appendix A