

SMALL TALK

By Joann Michelin

I took March Break seriously last month and missed my date to submit, so this might be a longer piece. So much has happened in our field in the last few months, and as an ECE I feel I need to champion the centers that have been offering the services the government claims are new to the early learning environment.

Full disclosure: I have been involved with my center for over 25 years. First as a parent, and now as an educator.

We were so excited with the changes the government launched in the Early Childhood field - they include us as part of the Education Department, they mandated an acceptable wage floor, they are undertaking to make centers accountable for their quality by initiating a Curriculum Framework and were providing monies for some centers to upgrade.

There was so much excitement in the air when the Federal government made funds available to our province to improve the early learning experiences for our children. The concept of a program made available to every family in our province was an early childhood educator's dream. We celebrated that the conviction. The early years are so important was being acknowledged. Those that hold the purse strings and the power to change were finally "getting it". Then the announcement was made Mr MacNeil's government was going to make it possible for all 4 year olds to attend a preschool program... but initiated a Preprimary Program in schools. This was brought in with very little consultation with those who were already invested in this area - early childhood educators, center owners and parents. The government offered a round table meeting to center operators in our area in October 2017, 2 months after the start of the Preprimary Program.

As one would expect, the established centers in our area were devastated. A huge portion of our families fall in this category. We had one year grace and then the Program was implemented in our schools. It did not have a huge effect in the first month, but then because of low enrollment they opened the program to families outside of the school catchment... then we were affected as were the other centers in our community.

That is the history in a nutshell. Having access to a quality early learning experience is essential. As ECEs it is incumbent upon us to make sure the information is available for families to make an informed choice. We do not have a huge budget to advertise, but, thankfully have a community publication, The Shoreline Journal, that is allowing us space to advocate for our centers.



Here is a comparison of services offered at private Early Learning Centre and the Pre-Primary program:

Early Learning Centers in Your area

- 1) Child centered, play based, 2) Qualified staff, 3) Part day/Full day options, 4) 18 mths-5 years (after school programs), 5) Offers children opportunities for social development and interactions with multi ages. Provides opportunities to interact with other adults, 6) Fees vary, subsidies available, 7) The development of the child socially and emotionally, not academically, is the center's philosophy for programming.

PrePrimary

- 1) Child center, play based, 2) Qualify staff, 3) Offered full day/voluntary attendance, 4) 4 year olds, 5) Offers children opportunities for social development and interactions with adults, 6) No cost to family, 7) Development of the child socially and emotionally, not academically, is the philosophy for programming.

The last point is so important. We are championing for a quality early learning experience for all children. The ECE's that are in the centers and in the Preprimary are equally qualified and dedicated. This is not to diminish their role at all. ECE's are the most qualified to provide the best experience for our littles (outside of the home). Children under 5 years old are too busy to have academics thrust on them and both programs endeavor not to do this.

I encourage you, as a parent, to research all possibilities in your area. If the Pre Primary program works for your family time wise or you really can't manage the cost of a center (remember there are subsidies), then absolutely that is your choice.

But, please, do not expect your child will be any more ready for Big School Primary than the experience offered by established, quality centers in your community. It is not meant to be a program that ensures children will be able print all the letters, know all their letter, numbers, etc.... they are too BUSY PLAYING TO LEARN, not working to learn!

CHILDREN LEARN AS THEY PLAY. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IN PLAY, CHILDREN LEARN HOW TO LEARN - O. Fred Donaldson



Great Village Elementary School

By Linda Harrington

Throughout the month activities were completed to recognize Earth Day. Pam Chandler of Green Schools Nova Scotia shared a presentation with each class. The younger students focused on conserving energy and had a great time making a draft snake. Students in Grades 2-4 learned about using water responsibly including making choices that would help to reduce our water footprint. Later in the month, all students had an opportunity to clean the ocean in the Grade P/1 class, removing garbage that is harmful to ocean life. Thank you to Mrs. Wylie's class for their leadership with this activity. Each day at school, there is a focus on good environmental practices as students recycle and compost in their classrooms and keep the playground clean by putting food wrappers in the garbage. GVES students set a good example for others to follow.

This month students were able to spend a morning at the library and the historeum. At the library, students could choose from a variety of activities in the youth section. They created with Lego, completed a scavenger hunt, played with the train set, and found some cozy spots to share a book with a friend, or to just read alone. A librarian also read to the students, and reminded them that a free library card gives access to many resources. While at the historeum, students had the opportunity to view all three floors but spent most of the time at the "Taste of Science" exhibit where they learned about the role of science in keeping food nutritious and safe for us to eat.

Students were thoroughly entertained as author Sheree Fitch shared her love of literature with each class. In addition to providing helpful ideas for writing, Sheree read a lot of her published work with students.

Students gathered in the

gymnasium recently to share music of African traditions they have been learning about in Music class. The P/1 class sang "Che Che Koolay" with students taking turns being the leader for this call and response song. Clapping patterns and movement were included in the Grade 2/3 presentation of "Kokoleoko". Grade 3/4 students were divided into three groups to perform "Sansa Kroma", with each group performing a spoken part with actions as well as singing the main part of the song together. The grand finale was an energetic performance with all students singing "Everybody Loves Saturday Night", in three languages—English, French and Nigerian! Thank you to Mrs. Sutherland for her leadership and to all the students for sharing their gift of music.

At the recent Home & School meeting, a design plan for the new playground was shared. WOW! The plan was created by Cobequid Consulting incorporating the ideas provided by our students. This major project will be completed in phases, and will start before the end of the school year. A reminder that accounts

have been set up for anyone to make a donation at Subway Bottle Exchange (refundables) and John Ross & Sons (scrap metal) by indicating their recyclables are for the Community Playground Project. If you are interested in helping with the Community Playground Project in any way, please email parent volunteers Kim Williams at newf6393@gmail.com or Allison Francis at jazminecody@hotmail.com.

Appreciation is expressed to Nicole Morse for her contributions as a member of the Home & School Executive for many years. Nicole will be stepping down as president in June, so a replacement is needed for September.

Next month, students are looking forward to going to a live theatre performance of Robert Munsch's "The Paper Bag Princess" at the Marigold Theatre. In May, the 2019-20 Grade Primary students will have an opportunity to experience going to school when they spend part of the morning with this year's P/1 class on May 30th. GVES Grade 4 students will have an orientation to WCCS earlier in the month.

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