

Understanding and Leading Capable, Confident, and Curious Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

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A user guide for directors, pre-primary leads, and other pedagogical leaders, as they support staff in engaging with the framework in their everyday practices.

MODULE 8: RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

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Introduction

The importance of relationship building is a foundational aspect of our framework. There are many types of relationships to consider, and we strive to develop authentic, inclusive relationships.

While we might think about relationships as being only between people, children are also seeking to engage in other types of relationships—for instance, with materials, with nature, and with the world as a whole. They want to be a part of everything that is going on around them, to know how the world works, and to be active within it.

Therefore, this module will look at several types of relationships, and gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of relationship building.

The module addresses the following questions, based on practices described in the framework:

- What does “relationship building” look like in practice?
- What works in terms of developing authentic relationships with children, families, and the community?
- What are the benefits of building strong relationships over time? How do these relationships affect our setting and program?
- How do children build relationships with materials, the environment, and the wider community?
- What is our “image of the parent” and how does this impact our program and our practices?
- What do families bring to our programs? How can we find out about their unique circumstances, their thinking, and ideas? How will we invite them to participate in meaningful ways?

Contents and Structure of this Package

You will find, within this guide, a range of recommended resources including articles, videos, and blogs. You will find background information about key topics, talking points, and connections to the framework. Choose whatever resources you feel are most important and useful for your educators.

The guide also includes:

- **Reflective questions** to help explore the topic. It is important to share these before each staff meeting or training event, in order for people to have time to reflect on where they are with relationship building.
- **Background information** to support you, as a pedagogical leader. (Also refer to Module 1: Pedagogical Leadership to refresh your memory about leadership approaches. The aim is to address the diverse needs and background knowledge of the educators.)
- **Suggested group activities** to make work on relationship building authentic and usable.
- **Suggestions for next steps** that provide ways of moving forward.

Facilitators are also provided with a PowerPoint to assist with introducing this module to directors and other leaders.

Points to Consider before Beginning

- Invite participants to share what they already know about the topic. Keep this prior knowledge in mind as you move forward. What have been their successes so far?
- What might be the differences in relationship building within different cultures and communities?
- Can you anticipate any concerns or challenges? If you are already hearing, for instance, that educators have challenges and need assistance in a particular area, you can keep this in mind and search for resources. Challenges should be discussed openly, not with a view to always solving the issue, but rather, to hear everyone's perspective.
- Share reading materials and links in advance, whenever possible. This will lead to more productive discussions and help participants to raise questions.
- Plan a balance between talk and action, attempting to find ways for the framework to come to life in practical and authentic ways.

Preparing for Meetings

- Are you comfortable with the topic? If not, it is important to read, talk with other leaders, attend workshops, and become very familiar with the resources in the Resources section.
- Use a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting for a fun icebreaker that will put people into a relaxed frame of mind. Provide time to eat if your staff are coming to the meeting right from their workday.
- Every adult learner is different in terms of their way of learning. Take into account the dynamics of your group when planning a training event. Newcomers, for instance, may be shy about sharing their previous experiences, but may have a lot to share. Who is experienced with aspects of relationship building? How can you use their experiences?
- Offer a way for participants to provide feedback after the event. This will guide you in terms of what to do next. Perhaps you will need assistance in order to move forward, or perhaps you will gather ideas from participants that are unexpected and novel.

Participants should

- read the provided material beforehand
- come prepared with their questions, ideas, and details of prior experiences and be prepared to share
- bring their curiosity and an open mind!

Module 8: Relationships with Families and Community

Background Information

The scope of relationships relevant to early childhood education is quite broad and includes relationships between

- children themselves
- children and the educators in the program
- educators and families
- educators and other professionals working with children (e.g., speech language pathologists, mental health professionals, physicians)
- educators and school personnel, especially for school-age child care programs
- educators and communities, such as libraries and family resource centres

(*Educator's Guide to Capable, Confident and Curious*, 43)



We should also add to this equation the importance of forming relationships with the land. Children who respect the Earth and the land are more likely to become the environmental stewards of the future. We can learn much from the *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework* (Government of Canada 2018) about these relationships.

When we consider the world at large, from the individual through to the global community, we realize that everything is interconnected through relationships. Children, for instance, are in relationship with the people and materials in their immediate environments. Relationships expand when they go to school—a new group of people, in a new-to-them community. They expand again as they travel, perhaps go to college or enter a work environment. And, as they learn more about the world at large—through experiences, formal learning, travel, and social media—they begin to understand that humans share more similarities than differences, and we are all often affected by events beyond our control. How will they navigate all of this? With confidence and innovation, or with trepidation and “going along” with whatever is happening around them?

Our framework describes a child who is “capable, confident, and curious.” How do we build relationships that support the development of these traits? How do we nurture critical thinkers? How do we involve children in meaningful civic and ecological contributions? These kinds of traits and actions begin with trusting relationships.



Children's Relationships with Educators

According to Dr. Carol Anne Wien, educators take on many roles: listener, creators of contexts, documenter, converser, researcher, creator of pleasure. She states that, "The stance of any teacher, to my mind, is one of empathetic responsiveness encompassing qualities such as authenticity (not scripted talk), attentiveness (close and careful listening to the children), and appreciation for children's intentions and attempts to learn." (personal communication, April 2016). What a wonderful relationship it would be if all young children were able to enter into a conversation (even a non-verbal

communication) with someone who takes their thinking seriously, takes time to consider it, and then responds thoughtfully. These are reciprocal relationships where everyone has a voice and is heard.

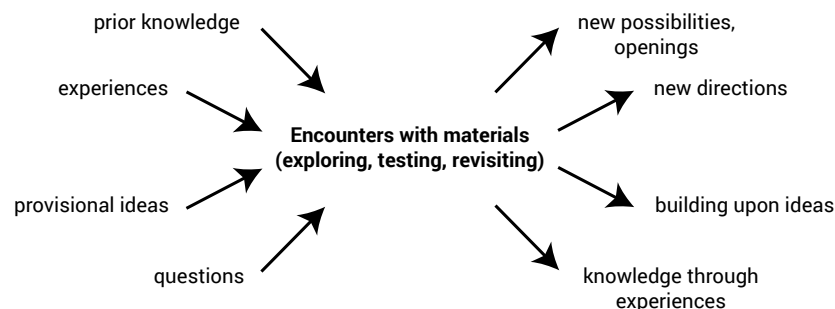
Previously, we learned about documentation as a tool for communication and learning. It is also a tool for relationship building, a form of "listening" and taking children's ideas seriously. Families are invited into this process, and they too are heard.



Childrens' Relationship with Materials

We tend to think of relationships as being between people, yet children also have strong relationships with materials. This graphic, constructed from the ideas of Matthew Sampson, a pre-primary educator in Halifax, NS, demonstrates how this happens:

Using Encounters with Materials as a Form of Inquiry



Materials "speak" to us, in that they—and the way they are presented—send a message. Children often have favourite materials, to which they return over and over again. Cause and effect are happening as they use them; a relationship between what the child does, and what the material does in return.



Childrens' in Relationship with their Community

Most educators use community facilities such as libraries and playgrounds. However, when we think about the daily lives of children, there are many more aspects of the community that impact their lives: grocery stores, hair salons, gas stations, recreation centres, together with services their parents engage with at home—the oil delivery person, people who provide repairs, suppliers of various sorts, food banks, etc. Which of these services and places

have captured the children's attention? Who do they have interactions with during their daily lives, and how will we learn about these people and groups? Some educators invite children to take the lead here and have the children "introduce" their educators to the community and how they interact with it.

Educators' and Leaders' Relationships with the Community

In the Small World Learning Centre PowerPoint Transcript and Christopher Allan's Preschool PowerPoint, the presenters share how the adults at their settings are involved in the community at large. These roles—serving on town committees, volunteering, taking part in fun community activities with their own families—all helped to build relationships with the community as a whole. When we are truly a part of our local community, the learning about each other travels in both directions; the community learns about us, our work, and our values, and we learn about how our community really works. This is civic engagement, and when we model this for the young children in our care, it sends a powerful message—we live in a democracy, and we can all be a part of it.

Being in a Relationship with Families

Much of our work centres around building relationships with families. We cannot truly know the child if we do not know the family. The family is the child's most important teacher, they know the child best, and we must be in collaboration with them in order to support the child. Our framework tells us that

"Family engagement encompasses more than family involvement. It goes beyond newsletters and information nights. It is more meaningful than inviting families to help build a new outdoor play area. Family engagement means that families are invited to give their opinions about the program's policies, participate and engage with other families in learning about how young children learn, and provide feedback about their child's experiences at the program; they are invited to be a part of their child's learning communities, in partnership with educators and early childhood education programs." (13).



Reflective Questions for Leaders

- How do we welcome new families into our program? How do we presently find out more about their lives, backgrounds, and expectations?
- How are families represented throughout our setting? How is their cultural knowledge made visible, and experienced in day-to-day living?
- Does our method of grouping children meet the needs of the children? Are the same-age groupings working? How else might children be grouped?
- How, as a leader, do I ensure that staff have opportunities to form collegial relationships with each other? Do we need to focus more on this?
- Can we form a Community of Practice with others in our area?

"A Community of Practice, as described by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, is a 'group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better' (2002). Such groups of like-minded people gather together on a regular basis to exchange in conversation about a particular topic in order to share experiences, learn from one another, and explore resources. In our field, it is so helpful to discuss our practices, vision, challenges and successes. Through interaction and reflecting with others in a community of practice, we are often able to grow our own passions, problem solve, or create new visions for next steps. Communities of Practice can be formal or informal groups and are often quite small in order to facilitate discussion, meeting as often as the group determines will be useful."

(Stacey 2019, 90)

-
- How do we resolve differences of opinion among our staff? Is this approach effective and constructive? (Refer back to Module 2: Pedagogical Leadership.)
 - What are the resources in our community that make sense to link with? What kinds of opportunities exist for children to contribute to their community?
 - How are families involved in decision making at your program? Do they have input into policy decisions, for instance?

Reflective Questions for Educators

- With your team, identify how your organization or team provides for connections, collaboration, and communication. How is this working for you? What do you enjoy and what else do you envision could contribute to relationship building?
- How well do you know each other and your children's families? Being curious about each other helps us to avoid making assumptions and jumping to judgement. It opens dialogue while navigating conflict and focuses on finding best solutions.
- How does "knowing yourself" contribute to building relationships with others?
- How are children "in relationship" with the materials in your room? What does this tell you?

NEXT STEPS

- Together with leaders and educators, reflect upon all the different types of relationships within your setting—where do you “shine” and where are the challenges? Ensure that all perspectives are heard and noted.
- What types of relationship building are the least threatening or difficult for educators? This will be a good place to start. Perhaps this will be relationships with materials, or relationships with the community. Ongoing conversations can uncover where people feel secure, and where they feel some anxiety.
- Develop some first steps in sharing some decision making with families. How might they be invited into this process? How can they help with problem solving?
- Take a look at your entrance; photograph it and present it in a large format to discuss at a staff meeting. What does this area say to newcomers? About the role of families in this setting? How would you feel as a newcomer entering this space?
- How can you find out about what parents know about your program? What does the community know about your program?
- Brainstorm one or two new ways that children can contribute in meaningful ways to their community.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK

- Widening networks of secure relationships help children develop confidence and feel respected and valued (*Educator's Guide*, 28).
- Children's learning and development are enhanced when educators value families as children's first and most influential teachers. An important part of the educator's role is to establish respectful relationships with parents and work in partnership with families (*Educator's Guide*, 28).
- Partnerships with families are based on understanding each others' expectations and attitudes. They build on the strength and trust of each others' knowledge (*Educator's Guide*, 29).
- A sense of belonging is integral to human existence. Children are part of a family, a culture, a neighbourhood/geographic location, and their wider community. The framework acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a child's developing sense of self—they shape who children are and who they become (*Capable, Confident and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework*, 15).

Appendix 1

Sample Activities for Building Relationships with Families

The Christopher Allan's Preschool PowerPoint has additional activities.

- Brainstorm/draw what a family looks like, then around the drawings:
 - list commonalities between families
 - list differences between families
- List the names (first and last!) of the families of each child in your care.
 - Who did you forget? Why?
- Think of a family you really get along with—why? What is it about this relationship that makes it work so well?
 - How can you develop this relationship with all families?
- Try the “Challenges, Considerations, and Possible Solutions” activity on the next page.
- What do families want from a child care program?
 - What do educators want from families?
 - How do you both get what you need?
- Brainstorm: “What do families deserve?”
- In pairs, role play with one partner as the educator and the other the parent:
Scenario: The director/administrator is not on site or is very busy. They hand off a parent to you to show them around your program. What will you do? Say? How might you handle certain situations?
For example, the parent
 - asks a lot of questions about “school readiness”
 - expresses concerns that their child is shy and will get “lost” in the crowd
 - wants to know all about behaviour guidance, because “my child will defy you”
 - is either anxious, or very assertive
- Reflect on and discuss this quote:
“Thought should be given to the effect the environment has on parents when they first enter the center. If their immediate impression is of shabbiness or carelessness, the likelihood of their being impressed with the center’s positive features will be lessened considerably.”
(Neugebauer and Schon 1978)
 - What would your centre “say” to families”? to the community? Consider the appearance, sounds, smells, as well as emotional environment.

Challenges, Considerations, and Possible Solutions

Challenge	Why? Considerations and Parent Perspective	Possible Solutions, Reactions, and Communication
Always questioning parent— about what feels like inconsequential things		
A parent that worries a lot about their child— giving you lots of instructions for their care		
A parent that is resistant to ideas or suggestions		
A parent that is quick to take offense and angers easily		
An unengaged parent— on phone, distant, always in a rush		
A parent who is forgetful— of clothing, diapers, does not read notices, etc.		

- Brainstorm and discuss: What does authentic communication look like? Role play with one partner as the speaker and the other as the listener:
 - The speaker talks about a topic they are really interested in for two minutes and the listener does not really listen. What did it feel like? What emotions did this illicit? Switch roles for another two minutes.
 - Repeat the same activity, but this time the listener really listens—what did this feel like?
- Reflect on and discuss the following questions:
 - What are your “hopes and dreams” for children?
 - Do these “hopes and dreams” match the families’ “hopes and dreams”?

Sample Activities for Exploring Relationships with Communities

- Role play a TV or radio show with an interviewer and someone as the director or pre-primary lead that has been very involved in the community. The director or pre-primary lead will tell or make up a story about what they have done to engage with the community, for example, involving most of the children and families in activities/events; discussing how the relationship benefits the community and the program.
- Using magazines and newspapers, design a front page of a local paper that features how a child care program has been involved in the community. Make up a “snappy” headline and a couple of articles showing the program’s involvement; for example, show how activities/events have involved most of the children and families, and how the relationship benefits the community and the program.
- Sometimes a children’s book, when read aloud to adults, can kick start a discussion about complex issues. Offer children’s books to read and discuss. For examples, see the Children’s Books for Community section in the Resources.

Reflections for Educators

Questions from the *Educators' Guide to Capable, Confident, And Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* (page 22)

- How and when do you begin relationships and communicate with families? How do you continue to build and enhance these relationships?
- How do you celebrate children's success and development with families?
- How do you know about the learning that is valued and expected for children within their family and community in the local cultural context?
- In what ways do you ensure that your early childhood education program, your decision making, and your employment processes reflect all local families and community members?
- How do you approach difficult issues that arise? How do you engage families in problem solving?
- How is responsibility for learning and teaching shared with families and communities?
- How do you explain play-based learning to families?
- How do you share knowledge with families about your program? What else can you do to make the learning visible?
- How do you share decision making with families? What are you willing to share decision making about? What more could be considered?
- What does your parent information and entrance area tell you about the place of families in your program? What messages are given to families about their place in your program? Is there a place for parents to sit, talk with other parents, or speak privately with staff?
- Have you considered doing an annual parent satisfaction survey to gain insight into how families feel about their children's experiences in your program?
- Have you thought about providing a suggestion box for parents near the entrance to your program or centre, where parents may drop notes with anonymous ideas? What other ways could you gain insights from families?
- What are some of the specific things that you do to welcome each child's family and support their confidence to work in partnership with you for their child's learning? Are those efforts working? How do you know? How else could you assess how your environment is supporting well-being?
- Have you considered arranging for professional development for all staff on issues related to cultural sensitivity, racism, and bias?

Supporting Engagement with Families: Breakout Room Topics

Beginning to form relationships:

At the intake procedure, while engaging in the “normal” information gathering, do you also:

- talk about and gather background information from the family, such as “What traditions do you follow?” and, “How do you celebrate them?”
- ask about likes and dislikes of the child, such as food and food allergies, interests, etc.
- ask, “How can I connect with you?” and, “What is the best way for you to connect with me?”
- Do you ask about ways that families can donate their skills, expertise, and experiences?

Diverse languages:

- Remembering that families may not be fluent in English, or would prefer to use another language, how will you accommodate and honour this?
- Can you obtain samples of well-used phrases in the child’s home language, to help them settle in?
- Is there a welcome sign in the family’s language? Who can help you with this?

The bigger, deeper, picture:

Other important information to gather from parents and guardians:

- What are your hopes and dreams for your child?
- What kind of adult do you hope your child is going to be?
- How is your child unique?
- What was your childhood like? What are your most fond memories?
- How do you and your child learn together?

Communicating with families on a regular basis (other than daily chats and daily activity plans):

- Do you know the first and last names of all the families using your service?
- Do you use individual notebooks, stickies, “Happy Grams,” notes about interesting things “your child” did today, newsletters, phone calls?
- Do you use social media such as Facebook, or software such as Storypark and HiMama?
- Do you use email, blogs, web pages, or portfolios?
- Do you loan favourite books and activities to families (perhaps you have duplicates, or can easily and inexpensively replace them)? Or, share “loose parts” that can be found inexpensively at thrift stores? Also ask for donations for this purpose.
- Do you offer and share information for families, such as recipes, information from Community Services, health centres, other family services, etc.

Presenting a welcoming and inclusive space:

How do families see themselves in the classroom/centre?

- photos, books, and posters about their community and families?
- pictures, books, artifacts representing their culture, ethnicity, family composition, etc.?

Reflecting with families:

- How do families reflect on the experiences, projects, documentation, and learning within your programs?
- Are they asked to contribute in some way—such as skills, information, materials?
- Do you ask for their ideas, perspectives, and wonderings? When these are offered, are they used?

Questions to Accompany Videos and PowerPoints

Christopher Allan's Preschool PowerPoint

- How would families view this centre?
- How is learning communicated with families?
- Is local cultural context valued at this centre?
- How are the families involved with this centre?
- How do you think the community “sees” Christopher Allan’s Preschool?

Justin's Story Case Study

- Why did Justin make the decision to have the children lead him on this journey?
Why was this important to him?
- How do you know the children are comfortable in the community?
- Why is it important that the children “tell stories” about the artefacts in the classroom, and places they go in the community?
- How did the community respond and why is this important and key to the work Justin was doing?

Piazza Piazze YouTube Video

- How do you think the educators prepare the children for this exploration of the community?
- What did the video tell you about children’s involvement in the town of Reggio Emilia?
- How do you think the community responds to the children being so visible? What would the benefits be for the centres/children in Reggio Emilia?
- What are the beliefs of the ‘image of the child’ in the community of Reggio Emilia?

Small World Learning Centre PowerPoint Transcript and Reflection Questions

This transcript and reflection questions can be used as an activity with directors and pedagogical leaders.

The facilitator should read the transcript beforehand to be familiar with the content.

Participants will divide into breakout groups of three to five (depending on the size of the group), read the transcript, and then discuss their reactions, ideas, etc. One person per group will report back to the main group.

Small World Learning Centre, “Engaging Mind, Body, and Spirit”

Slide 1:

Hi, I am Donna Stapleton, Executive Director of Small World Learning Centre—located in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. I have been invited to share our work in creating a sense of “community” for our educators, children, families, readers, and other organizations.

In 2001, I accepted the position of Executive Director. I was new to the community with no network of professionals in the community. So, I had to start from scratch. One challenge I had to face was changing the programming from a traditional nursery school to an emergent curriculum. I knew I needed support and research to reach this goal. I wrote letters to primary teachers asking how to ease children’s transition to school and what were their expectations. I met with the elementary school coordinator for the school board and together we wrote an article for the newspaper and she attended our center meetings.

I reached out to the Family Resource Centre’s Executive Director and asked for her support through workshops for the staff and families, and for connecting with other professionals. We invited other professionals into our program to help with children and families with special needs.

By attending many workshops and the annual Child Care Connections conferences, I began to find colleagues to network with, many of whom have become mentors.

Slide 2:

At Small World we try to take every opportunity to make connections with other organizations to build a professional network in our community. We partnered with the Family Resource Centre and helped them create a mud kitchen for the children; we partnered with the Nova Scotia Community College in the business program, in which Alex Peeler created a marketing plan for our center that included a Facebook page to help build community. Electrical students at NSCC designed electrical blue prints for our 2016 addition to the center.

We take advantage of opportunities like:

- the Partnerships for Inclusion project with Liz Hicks
- the pilot for the Nova Scotia Early Learning Framework
- the Dalhousie Physical Literacy in the Early Years project
- Incredible, Edible Bridgewater vegetable project technical education student at the local high school, Park View, designed and built custom shelving for our art room and storage shed

I felt a need to connect to other ECEs directly for support, and became a member of Child Care Connections and co-created the South Shore Directors group, became a member of the Non-Profit Directors Association, a member of the Provincial Early Years Partnership group, a member of the Association of ECEs of NS, and currently am a member of the Child Care Federation.

To connect with the town, I joined various committees usually as a stakeholder for Small World Learning Center, and for children and families in our community. These committees were: a breast-feeding initiative group, the Bridgewater Open Space Network, and Energize Bridgewater.

As a lifelong learner I continue to learn to support my role as Executive Director. In 2006–7, I attended the Management Development for Women program at Mount St. Vincent University and St. Mary's, continuing and building on my commitment to community. In 2018, I graduated with my Bachelor of Applied Human Service with distinction from McEwan University.

Slide 3:

Staff meetings are important to us and are used to develop relationships with each other. We have focused on forest and nature and learning about new technology for our portfolios and documentation. We have used iPads and are currently using tablets. Staff meetings are used as professional development workshops, and we also schedule time to discuss how we are connecting children to our community, and how are we connecting our organization to our community.

Some of our educators talk about how they volunteer in the community, e.g., coaching, gymnastics, curling, girl guides, fire halls, churches, youth organizations, 4H, etc.

Staff invite others to the center to share their knowledge and expertise with the children, such as First Nations Elders, martial artists, gymnasts, drummers, ukulele players, etc.

Slide 4:

To build our connections with our local ECE professional community, we have entered in a partnership with the YMCA's school-age program. Both our programs have scheduled time to meet together with the children and educators to connect. They have monthly days in the forest; they have had field trips together; they have put loose parts boxes together and challenged each other to put something together for the other group; and we have invited the Y staff to our forest education evening workshops.

We host a Caring at Work Award event, where all the educators from local child care centers come together.

Slide 5:

We build a larger sense of community for the children through a shared reading program and visits to the library.

A colleague, Liz Hicks, told us about how she started a shared reading program with a local elementary school. So, we called our local elementary school and asked the principal if some teachers would partner with us with a shared reading program once a month. This program has been going for several years.

At first, we asked the library if we could bring a small group of children to their programs, now they call us and invite the children to many of their activities.

Slide 6:

We do the usual types of community connections by visiting the fire and police stations, grocery stores, restaurants, and have guest speakers. We visit small businesses and the children have made neighbourhood maps. We also have members (of the community) who visit with goats, chickens, dogs, and geckos. We also are members of the Green Schools of Nova Scotia, and that is the work we do on our vegetable garden and rain barrel collecting.

We have community members that help us with the gardening and greenhouse, and others who do drumming, teach ukulele, sewing, and dancing.

Slide 7:

We have worked on expanding and building our community collaborations with local businesses. Rosemary Lohnes is the owner of Helping Nature Heal and runs the Open Spaces Network group. She had come to a forest meeting and heard that I wanted to create a wheelchair accessible pathway into the forest. She donated all the resources to make it happen.

We often email families pictures of what we dream about having and they make it happen, such as log chairs, picnic tables, benches, kindling for our fire pit, loose parts (tiers, planks, driftwood, beach glass, wool, etc.). We are very lucky in our community!

Slide 8:

Our vision for the forest and nature play in our community is a work in progress. We purchased one acre of land from the Bridgewater Development Association in 2006, and in 2007 we built and re-located to a new child care center. The piece of land we purchased is in the Industrial Park, however, it is close to residential housing, adjacent to the Centennial Trail and ½ km walk from the local school. The land next to the center has not been developed and contains foot trails from years gone by. The children immediately started playing in the forest and over the years have built little camps, and so our educators have added items to make it part of our outdoor classroom.

In 2013, during our 35th birthday celebration a town councillor asked, “How much land does Small World own?”, as the children were well past the boundary lines! I said, “You don’t want to know!”, then I laughed, and told him that we owned up to the tree line. The idea of gaining forest access started to percolate, however, I was too busy dreaming of other things to put this as a priority.

The children continued to make the forest their own; making drawing areas and gathering areas; they would clear the fall down brush for walkways; they went snow shoeing in the winter; hammocks were set up for napping occasionally, and of course we created the fairy walk. So, we were on a journey and I had to decide how to make this happen. We did not have the money to make this work.

Slide 9:

It is taking much perseverance! In 2016, I became a representative as a stakeholder for Small World on a new Open Space Network committee for the town of Bridgewater. This committee is made up of three residents and four stakeholder organizations who are passionate about their community, healthy living, and open spaces. Through this committee, we were identifying spaces where people can gather, and of course our forest was identified as being used by Small World Learning Centre, residents and the community. Now this idea of gaining the forest became a little bigger, and I started planting seeds that I hoped would sprout with others and the community. Members of the Open Space group met at various locations. A parent, Kate, who was on the committee, and other members of the committee, were invited to walk the trail and hike the forest to discuss this vision. Rosemary Lohnes from Helping Nature Heal, Ida Scott from the Bridgewater Development Association, and Sandy Mair-Dodman from the Department of Recreation came to a meeting. We began dreaming and scheming.

A side spin to this was Kate and I went to the 100 Blue Noses Who Care event to ask for funds for muddy buddies so the children would stay warm and dry—“There is no bad weather, just bad clothing!” We did not win big money that night, however we won because a local business owner gladly donated to the muddy buddies.

Slide 10:

Back to our vision. In 2017, the Bridgewater Development Association dissolved. The land went back to the town and this caused a lot of red tape, policy changes, and we had to start all over again. Sandy retired from the Department of Recreation, and the town lead on the Open Spaces Network relocated, which led to the town planner having to restructure roles throughout recreation and other committees. The town planner has promised to look at this network in the winter of 2020. Things were slowing down. We had to consider a Plan B. We could not give up.

Back to strategic planning and more networking. We had a plan to enhance education and a forest nature plan. We had three educators enroll in the Forest and Nature Practitioners course. This is five intensive days, and a year to complete assignments. Five others enrolled in an online course called Outdoor Play, which was offered by the Child Care Federation.

Slide 11:

In conclusion, building a community for an organization takes a vision, many years of effort, persistence, and patience. Just start with one thing and see where it takes you. Ask reflective questions to your team, such as “What sense of community have we created for the children, families, with education, other professionals, other organizations, neighbours, businesses, and with our cities and towns?”

“What is next?”

Create a vision. Think BIG.

Our work is for the children and they deserve beautiful places where they feel part of a large community.

(Update: Small World was recently granted the forest land that they had been seeking! Plus, staff are also being trained in the Before and After School Outdoor Program Project.)

Possible Questions for Reflection

1. How do Donna, staff, and the board demonstrate their vision of “engaging mind, body, and spirit” while reaching out to the community?
2. How do you show your vision and values to your community? What other things could you do? Who could you reach out to? What organisations could you support, and vice versa?
3. Donna has connected strongly with the local town council and businesses. Why and how is this a benefit to the child care centre and to the community?
4. Is this something you could do? Why, or why not?
5. How does the community you live in see your centre? How do you know?
6. How is the community in which Small World is located reflected in the practices and environment at the centre?
7. In what ways could you involve the children in the wider community? What if you asked the children: What do you see in the community? What would you like to see in the community? What would you like to know more about in your community?

Appendix 2

Resources

Web

National Association for the Education of Young Children:

www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement

Videos

“Piazza Piazza”: www.youtube.com/watch?v=g65Z07zbVKI

“The Power of Vulnerability” (Brené Brown, TEDxHouston, June 2010):

www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

“The Value of Parents in the Reggio Approach” (Reggio Emilia Official Site; video and information on parent and community involvement):

<https://reggioemilia2015.weebly.com/parent-and-community-involvement.html>

Blog

“NAEYC: Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities”:

www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/building-reciprocal-relationships

Tip Sheet

“Celebrating Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood Services” (Government of New South Wales, AU):

www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au/ContentFiles/Files/diversity-in-practice-tipsheet-2.pdf

Books

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NOTES

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