



News From a Tiny Seed

Roots of Empathy Capacity Building Workshop

In December 2008, Monique Gray Smith, Seeds of Empathy's (SOE) Aboriginal¹ Advisor, and Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, PhD from the Child and Adolescent Development Laboratory at the University of British Columbia, spoke to Seeds of Empathy's national office staff, as well as representatives from the government, education and social services sectors.

Gray Smith presented about Aboriginal strength and resilience and the synergies between SOE and traditional Aboriginal teachings and beliefs. "Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" is the legacy of the last 135 years for First Nations' people in Canada, says Gray Smith, and it is her belief that SOE's philosophy, which celebrates children's voices and

feelings, can be a powerful tool for self-determination for Aboriginal children. She ended with a strong call to action, "When working with our people, remember our history and our resiliency. Focus on strengths and assets, rather than deficits."

For the second part of the workshop, Dr Schonert-Reichl provided an overview of the process evaluation of the Seeds of Empathy program in British Columbia in 2007-08. Researchers evaluated the implementation of the program and what the perceived benefits and challenges were. Overall the results are very positive and suggest that the SOE program works well in BC. To view video footage of these presentations, click here. ↪

PD Day: Sharing Experience and Knowledge

Last fall, approximately 20 Early Childhood Educators from the Edmonton-Calgary corridor met in Red Deer, Alberta, for a professional development day. Roots of Empathy Founder/President Mary Gordon and Director of Curriculum Donna Letchford presented workshops on Art & Heart and Temperament and Kim Motz and Baby Matthew participated in a demonstration family visit. Participants were asked to give one piece of advice or key learning they would share with a new Centre or Family Guide/Literacy Coach starting the program. Here are a few of their reflections.

"Pick up on children's cues throughout the day and connect what they are doing and saying back to the books and the baby." (Jodie Vesso, Beaumont Early Learning)



"Read the book to someone else before the children so you're very comfortable doing it in front of the kids." (Mary-Anne Kinley, Red Deer College Child Care Centre)

"Document and share with parents. Communicate with parents about what they observe/hear from their children at home." (Tammy Kokocki, Beaumont Early Learning Centre) ↪

Sharing Circle

Dramatic Play

Claudia (left) reads to Aaiden (centre) and William (right) at the Fulton Child Care Association in Alberta. Every SOE centre has a space where a small lavender blanket allows children to engage in dramatic play outside of regular SOE visits. Children often reenact scenes from family visits using a doll to substitute for "their" baby. Or they may recreate a SOE literacy circle in a spontaneous celebration of the joy of reading—as in this example. ↪



1. For the purposes of this newsletter, the term Aboriginal refers collectively to the indigenous inhabitants of Canada, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.

In Line for Empathy

Literacy Coach JoyDawn Corbeil from the Early Learning Child Care Centre in Beaumont, Alberta, shares this story: “At our centre, being first in line is a very big deal, and being the last in line is the ‘worst.’ One day we were heading outside and a little boy who was last was very upset about it. We were going downstairs when he got angry, began to cry and sat down and wouldn’t move. The rest of the children and I were waiting at the bottom of the stairs. A little girl who was second last held her hand out and said, ‘Here, you can go in front of me.’ Amazed, the little boy stood and went in front of her. The little girl smiled and seemed fine to be at the end of the line.”

In SOE, during Theme 2 Crying, children are taught that ‘a crying baby is not a bad baby but a baby with a problem and it is up to us to help them’. The SOE baby is the ‘Teacher’ and a lever which the Family Guide uses to help children identify, and reflect on their own feelings and understand the feelings of others. This little girl was able to take the perspective of how the little boy was feeling and help him feel better. Adults can not legislate kindness and understanding. This little girl has become a “changer” as she has taken empathy action

in response to the unhappiness of another. It is only when children have intrinsic motivation to understand and help others that our world will change, child by child. ☞

Drawing on Feelings

Art is visual communication. Five-year-old Kezdin from A’Q’Amnik Daycare, St. Mary’s Band, Cranbrook, B.C. has managed to communicate clearly that he is feeling mad with a few sparse circles, lines and dots. SOE curriculum art activities such as the one here invite children to express how they are feeling through their art. This is emotional literacy at its best. ☞



feeling or trying to communicate. Chloe understands not only that facial expressions can be powerful tools of communication, but also that she can teach other people about her feelings by helping them to observe her face—just as the Kaatza Centre has done with their SOE baby. ☞

Have You Heard? Love Grows Brains

Neuroscientists in recent years claim that much of what a child needs for brain development occurs within nurturing relationships with other people. Ten years ago, Mary Gordon spoke metaphorically of this when she proclaimed, “Love grows brains.” She has been called the “poet of neuroscience.” ☞

“We put a wide world of control and confidence in the hands and hearts of our children when we teach them how to identify and name emotions and how to use language or art or story-telling to convey their feelings.”

~ Mary Gordon, Founder/President of Roots of Empathy and Creator of Seeds of Empathy

Why is our newsletter called Lavender Blanket?

In Seeds of Empathy Centres, children gather around a lavender blanket where the loving relationship between a parent and baby is the lever for learning. The blanket is where learning and sharing takes place—and that’s what we want this newsletter to be, too! Lavender Blanket is a bi-monthly update on what’s happening with Seeds of Empathy. If you would like to be added to our distribution list, or to unsubscribe, please e-mail lavenderblanket@seedsofempathy.org

250 Ferrand Dr., Suite 800, Toronto, ON M3C 3G8 t: 416-944-3001 f: 416-944-9295 mail@seedsofempathy.org www.seedsofempathy.org

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