



THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING AND COACHING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGEABLE PROFESSIONALS

Research has demonstrated that the overall tone of the organization is set by the management staff and there is a direct correlation between the level of quality of the early learning and child care setting and the level of mentoring and coaching support provided.

NADINE'S STORY


Nadine has her Early Childhood Education (ECE) Diploma and has been working in a small, licensed child care centre in an urban community for the past four years. Recently, she has taken on the role of Acting Supervisor as the Supervisor was in a serious car accident and not expected to return to work for several months. Although Nadine has a peripheral understanding of this new role, she has found the last month to be somewhat challenging having taken on full responsibility for the Centre's operations including supervising staff, communicating with the parents and completing the administrative duties. Due to this learning curve, Nadine has relied heavily on Patricia, a friend and colleague in the community who has been in a supervisory capacity for several years. Patricia, empathetic to Nadine's situation, has been informally coaching her and suggested she participate in the monthly network meetings geared to Supervisors.

Six months have passed and the Centre Supervisor is scheduled to return to work shortly. Nadine is looking forward to her return but realizes a part of her will miss continuing in this leadership role. Through participating in the Supervisors' Network, she has become more familiar with "Raising the Bar" on Quality, a program designed to help families ensure their children are receiving high-quality early learning and child care services. Nadine has developed new skills and enjoys being in a mentoring relationship with staff as they engage in professional education opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding of the use of an emergent curriculum approach. She was instrumental in revising the schedule to allow teachers paid time to conduct weekly program planning and the opportunity to participate in community professional education workshops. Reflecting upon the overall experience, Nadine shares her triumphs and challenges with the Centre Supervisor following her return. The Supervisor senses a newfound level of confidence and enthusiasm Nadine has for the profession and encourages her to upgrade her education by enrolling in a Post-Diploma ECE Leadership, Administration and Supervision Program offered at the local College. Nadine is now aspiring to broaden her career path by seeking a supervisory position.

As noted in "Investing in Quality – Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents", Best Start Expert Panel on

Quality and Human Resources, 2007, “The education, attitudes and expertise of program supervisors and directors are also key factors in the quality of early learning and care services. Knowledgeable leaders are better able to mentor staff, promote best practices, communicate effectively with parents, and link families to other services.”

“Raising the Bar” on Quality addresses the four fundamental principles of the “Partners In Practice”, Mentoring Model (Ferguson, Ferguson-McCormack, Soave, Singleton, 1999), they are:

-  **Support and Recognition:** The contributions made to children, families and communities by early childhood practitioners are valued and must be supported and recognized.
-  **Reflective Practice:** Reflective practitioners achieve excellence in early childhood practice.
-  **Continuous Growth:** To value growth and development, we must value our own growth and development.
-  **Building Relationships:** Mentoring relationships are based on honour, respect and modesty.

THE HAMILTON STORY – LESSONS LEARNED: INTENTIONAL MENTORING PILOT



For many years, Early Childhood Educators in Hamilton have experienced the benefits of informal mentoring through relationships with co-workers, college faculty, ASCY staff and members, and members of the Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario, Hamilton Branch (AECE,O). However, an interest in more intentional mentoring and in supporting a culture for mentorship among all early learning and child care staff at all career stages was ignited when a small group participated in the “Partners In Practice” Institute offered at the 2001 AECE,O Provincial Conference held in Peterborough Ontario. The “Partners In Practice” (PIP) training was then offered locally to members of the Supervisors’ Network. The next year, a small group of ASCY consultants, lead mentors in


the community, and colleagues from Brant County, attended the “Partners In Practice” - Animating Mentoring Certificate Training in Halifax. Upon their return, the group met regularly to discuss strategies to promote mentoring and reflective practice among ECEs in Hamilton and Brant County.

Originally, the Hamilton area PIP had envisioned a more orchestrated mentorship program through which we would match mentors with protégés. This approach was piloted among 14 mentor pairs over six months. While the experience was seen as valuable to the participants, the art of “matchmaking” was complex. With growing interest in mentoring, we could foresee that this level of coordination could not be sustained.

While direct “matchmaking” is not available, the culture for mentoring has emerged nonetheless. This changing climate was evident in the Healthy Child Care Environment Evaluation Report where there was an increase in the number of ECEs who reported being involved in mentoring or networking.

We attribute the changes to:







-  Increased networking opportunities for ECEs at all career stages and in many roles. Example: Supervisors’ Network, Cooks’ Network, School-Age Network etc.
-  Increased access to networking through geographically defined “Area Networks”,
-  “Partners In Practice” training - an ongoing service provided by ASCY and the “PIP”
-  The fact that many of the mentors in our community have completed “Best Choices”, Guidebook to the Ethical Journey, which is offered by the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF).
-  The “Partners In Quality”, Canadian Child Care Federation workshop series, delivered by ASCY, was another pathway to reflective practice.
-  ECEs’ awareness of the concept of mentoring, and using the term to describe previously established relationships with trusted colleagues.

 “Raising the Bar” which brought everyone to a common understanding of “high quality”, of the importance of supporting each other in delivering high-quality services, and to respect and value the diversity of our programs.

In Hamilton, a culture for mentorship means that every individual has a place to turn to attain help and advice, to obtain feedback, to bounce ideas or to air concerns.

Early Learning Framework Guiding Principle: Knowledgeable and responsive early childhood practitioners are essential to early childhood settings.

KNOWLEDGEABLE PRACTITIONERS

-  Have post-secondary education in early childhood development with opportunities for career advancement.
-  Are well-compensated in terms of remuneration, benefits including a pension plan, paid time for program planning and career development
-  Have a positive working environment and relationships with colleagues and community professionals.
-  Are actively engaged in professional education and keep abreast of new knowledge and trends in the field.
-  Are engaged in observational and reflective practices.
-  Interact with the children as play facilitators.
-  Are supported by the Director/Supervisor of the early learning setting.

“RAISING THE BAR” ON QUALITY - PLATINUM RECOGNITION

Through the “Raising the Bar” programs, Early Childhood Educators and early years’ staff have the opportunity to earn a certificate of “Platinum Recognition” for their professional education. The certificates are presented to individuals for exemplary commitment to professional education. Eligible recipients complete 10 training events or 20 hours of professional education during the course of a year and are encouraged to include all professional education activities, including workshops, networking events, seminars, post-secondary and post-graduate studies. In 2008-‘09, the aggregate total number of hours completed by the 362 recipients of the RTB Platinum Recognition and a total of 17,805.20 hours.

CAREER PATHWAYS

Despite the number of students graduating from the Early Childhood Education Program, it has become challenging to entice these individuals to practice in the field. Many students are opting to use their ECE Diploma as a stepping stone to further their educational pursuits to Degree Programs and, consequently, Teacher’s College. For those who do enter the field, the low remuneration, lack of benefits and opportunities for advancement do little in the way of encouraging ECEs to remain in the profession.

Early learning and child care professionals in Hamilton recognized the dilemma we are facing and decided to take proactive measures. A group of community professionals initiated the Recruitment and Retention Committee to further assess and address the issue. Recently, they unveiled a Career Tree which depicts the recommended skills and variety of educational and career pathways open to Early Childhood Educators. This provides ECEs with an understanding of future pathways and educational pursuits they may wish to explore as they navigate their career. To view a copy of the Career Tree, please visit our website at www.ascy.ca under the Professional Education section.

Recently, Charles Sturt University (CSU), which originated in Australia and has a campus in Burlington, Ontario, announced that it will be offering a Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies. This is a four-year Honours degree program that builds on the Early Childhood Education Diploma offered at Ontario colleges. CSU worked in collaboration with Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology and the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning to develop this Program. The Program will begin in the fall of 2009. For more information, please visit

www.charlessturt.ca.

STRONG ATTACHMENTS ARE KEY TO A YOUNG CHILD'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Qualified ECEs who have a sound knowledge and experiential base and are able to set the stage for an ideal physical learning environment are key factors in high-quality early learning and child care settings. This must, however, be coupled with practitioners who understand and are capable of developing nurturing relationships and positive interactions with children and families.

“Responsive caregiving is very important to all types of learning – learning language and other skills, emotion regulation and how to get along with others. Infants and young children who are surrounded by adults who respond to their cues warmly and promptly have the best outcomes,”

says Alison Niccols, Ph.D, Psychologist/Clinical Director, Infant-Parent Program, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University.

Research in recent years has validated the importance of the early years of a child's life, particularly the first 3 to 6 years which set the

foundation for a child's development, health and well-being throughout his/her life. “To thrive during their childhood and become competent adolescents and adults, young children need strong attachments with significant adults in their lives as well as opportunities to explore, communicate, develop skills, and learn to respect and get along with others.” (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006)

The Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) developed by Jeffery Arnett is a reliable and valid tool that can be used to assess the teacher's interactions with the children. This 26-item scale measures the emotional tone, discipline style and responsiveness of the teacher in the classroom and can be conducted by the Supervisor or an external consultant. In Hamilton, the CIS is often used by ASCY Professional Education Consultants while conducting site visits to licensed programs in conjunction with environmental assessment tools.






Responsive practitioners have a strong understanding of child development but are also able to apply this knowledge to create meaningful learning experiences for the children through play-based learning while being respectful and inclusive at the same time. Practitioners act as resource agents and facilitate the children's learning by providing them with access to information and the necessary tools to safely explore and discover their areas of interest. Through this process, practitioners support the child to draw his/her own conclusions, thereby giving the child the opportunity to develop key skills such as reasoning, negotiation and problem-solving.

ASCY regularly offers social skills' training workshops such as Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT (RIRO) and The Virtues Project. RIRO is a social skills and reflection workshop for adults working with children and considered a resiliency promotion program for young children. The

Program helps children learn to think more flexibly and accurately and to connect with others as a way to cope with change, frustration and stress. The Virtues Project can be used in a variety of ways to help support the development of character and self-esteem in children. Look for these and other educational training opportunities in our Fall 2009 Professional Education Brochure or by visiting our on-line Professional Education Calendar at

www.ascy.ca/training_intro.htm.

RESPONSIVE PRACTITIONERS ...

-  Have a sound knowledge of child development and are able to transfer this knowledge into practice providing safe, stimulating learning opportunities for the children based on their age, level of development and areas of interest.
-  Interact and respond to the children in a positive and calm manner demonstrating genuine warmth, compassion, enthusiasm and interest in the children.
-  Set reasonable limits for the children to ensure everyone's safety and well-being physically and emotionally and guide children in their understanding of the importance and necessity of these limits.
-  Observe the children's development, behaviour, environment and his/her interactions, making modifications based on his/her reflections of what is working well and what could be changed to enhance and/or ensure successful learning experiences for the children and their families.
-  Promote inclusivity and engage in respectful communications with children, parents, colleagues and community professionals. Add RTB Platinum Level –background information, aggregate statistical information.



ASCY WEBSITE

Check out the following features on the ASCY website by visiting

www.ascy.ca:

- Community Event Listings are outlined under the “Community Happenings” section. This is where early years’ services can post upcoming community events such as the Neighbourhood Service Provider Networks, forums, conferences, etc.
- Connect to the Early Literacy Hamilton BLOG for upcoming events and information on literacy in Hamilton via the link outlined in the “Professional Education” section.
- Visit the Job Board under the “About ASCY” section to find postings on ASCY and community job openings in the early learning and child care sector.

Hamilton
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