

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a publicly funded, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

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The Ministry of Education Wants A Dialogue on their "Draft Early Learning Framework"

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On May 1, 2007 BC's Ministry of Education posted a "Draft Framework on Early Learning". (See <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/drafts/elframework-draft.pdf>).

Now, the Ministry is seeking a 'community dialogue' on the Framework through focus groups and an on-line survey at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/drafts/el-framework-response.htm>.

In many ways, there is little in the document to disagree with. It draws on exemplary early childhood practice and curricula from Reggio Emilia in Italy and Sweden and New Zealand. It views children as strong and capable; it highlights the importance of relationships and quality environments; it supports holistic development through play; it focuses on 4 important areas of early learning — Well-being and Belonging, Exploration and Creativity, Languages and Literacies, and Social Responsibility and Diversity, and it acknowledges the unique early learning needs of BC's First Nations children.

None of this is new to BC's early childhood educators and quality child care providers. It reflects their education and their practice. In another context the Framework could help raise awareness about early childhood education and be a unifying vision on which to build.

But here's the rub. Just as children's development is dependent on and interconnected with their family and community environment, effective early learning is equally dependent on the public policy and funding environment in which they operate.

And, when we consider that larger environment, this Framework looks like one more brick in the wall BC is trying to build between early learning and child care.

BC's Premier gave the Minister of Education responsibility for 'early learning' after the last provincial election. In one of his most misguided public policy decisions to date, Campbell separated responsibility for early learning programs from responsibility for child care — which remains the responsibility of a junior Minister of State in the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

There are 2 fundamental problems with this separation:

1. It denies that quality child care IS early learning.
2. It allows government to say they care about early learning while they continue to dismantle child care — the very early learning service that working families and their children need.

A quick look at some Ministry of Education 'early learning' initiatives demonstrates the growing divide clearly. Over the last two years, the Ministry of Education has:

- Moved to entrench discrimination against working families through amendments to the BC Schools Act that will legally define 'early learning programs' as programs that children attend with a parent or a caregiver.
- Used federal child care funds to fund Strong Start programs which are free, universal school-based programs only for children who attend with their parents or caregiver.
- Contracted for development of a post-secondary training program for Strong Start Facilitators seemingly ignoring existing Early Childhood Education Certificate and Diploma programs.

Given this context – it's important that government hears a consistent message from the community about its Early Learning Framework.

While the on-line survey seems designed to make it difficult to comment on the bigger picture, there are some places where your answers can make a difference.

Each section of the survey asks for general satisfaction levels (from very satisfied to very dissatisfied) and has a place for comments.

In the section of the survey about **Purpose:**

- ✓ Tell government that you are **Dissatisfied** with this section of the Framework
- ✓ Add a comment like

The primary purpose of the document is to support adults to create environments and experiences that support young children's early learning. But documents do not create environments and experiences — good public policy and adequate funding do. Regrettably, BC has neither. Recent cuts to child care and legislated exclusion of working families from free Early Learning programs put even more BC children at risk.

In the section of the survey about **Context for Early Learning in British Columbia:**

- ✓ Tell government that you are **Very Dissatisfied** with this section of the Framework
- ✓ Add a comment like

This part of the Framework denies the reality faced by working families, their children and communities. By 2004, close to 150,000 children from 0-5 had mothers in the paid labour force. Yet, there were only approximately 36,000 full time regulated child care spaces to meet their early learning and care needs. Recent cuts to the Child Care Operating Fund have made these spaces less stable and more expensive. The real current context for early learning in BC is high fees, low wages and long wait lists.

In the final 'box' asking for other comments and suggestions, tell government that

The majority of BC families need child care. Drop-in programs that require a parent to be on site do not meet the early learning needs of most BC children. If government really cared about early learning it would develop and fund a quality child care system that meets the early learning and care needs of all BC children and recognizes and compensates early childhood educators for the value of the work they do. I judge government's commitment to young children by its behaviours, not by its words. So far, this government is failing.

These are the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC's contributions to the Ministry of Education's dialogue about Early Learning.

If you agree, go to http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/drafts/el_frameworkform.htm BY JUNE 1 and help us tell the provincial government that we are not fooled by their hypocrisy. It will take more than lofty visions for Early Learning to make a difference in the lives of families, children and communities.