



**ECEBC** | early childhood  
educators of BC

**The Early Childhood Educators of BC Leadership Initiative  
2009 Leadership Institute #1 Report  
February, 2009**

**Background**

As part of its evolving Leadership Initiative, ECEBC hosted a 5 day Leadership Institute from Jan. 28 – Feb. 1, 2009. The Institute was held in Vancouver, at the ECEBC Offices.

A total of 23 participants attended the Leadership Institute. They all came from the 10 identified Communities of Innovation. Each of these communities had submitted a proposal outlining their willingness to undertake a community based project to build the leadership capacity of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) to raise the profile of and respect for the work of ECEs in their community. From close to 40 proposals, the ECEBC Leadership Initiative Advisory Committee (see Attachment 1 for Advisory Committee Members) selected 10 diverse communities and projects to work with in 2009. (See Attachment 2 for a list of Communities of Innovation and a brief description of their projects)

Each Community of Innovation identified 2 or 3 licensed-to-practice ECEs who would attend this Leadership Institute (and 2 future Leadership Events) and would play an on-going leadership role in their community project. As much as possible, communities were encouraged to send 'emerging ECE leaders' rather than well established or experienced leaders.

One exception was made to the requirement that participants hold valid BC ECE Licenses to Practice. Lower Post, a northern, isolated First Nations community, has recently reopened their child care centre but has no fully qualified ECEs in their community. Two community members from Lower Post who are receiving their ECE training attended the Institute.

The Leadership Institute was designed to integrate 3 strands

1. Building an ECE Culture of Leadership
2. Building Leadership Capacity
3. Community Project Development

The attached Institute Agenda (see Attachment 3) outlines the topics, activities and processes that were used to support learning and growth in all three areas.

Rita Chudnovsky, the Leadership Initiative Coordinator seconded from Douglas College, designed and facilitated the Institute with active involvement from a number of key individuals.

## **Institute Reflections**

Based on active observation and reflection throughout the Institute and on-going and final participant feedback, the following key reflective/evaluative themes emerged.

### **1. Participant Engagement**

Given the important role the Institute plays in helping to create an ECE culture and community of leadership, it was longer and more intensive than most professional development activities. As a result, there was some question about whether it would be possible to sustain the participant's interest level and active engagement for the full five days.

However, participants report that the duration and intensity were a strength rather than problem. While participants and facilitators were tired – participants maintained an incredibly high level of energy and a thirst for leadership development throughout. They report that the length of the Institute made it possible for them to develop relationships with each other; to process much of what they were learning; to see their own growth and to feel more empowered and confident.

As some participants said in their final feedback:

*The 5 days – while long, were helpful in that it was not rushed but gave us time.*

*(Next time) I suggest that we do at least 4 – 5 days.*

*I am sad to hear the May (institute) is only three days because five days with all these wonderfully passionate friends seems too short now that we are preparing to say goodbye.*

To a large degree, this high level of engagement speaks to the commitment and leadership capacity that participants brought to the Institute. This suggests that the focus on identifying and involving 'emerging leaders' was appropriate and should continue.

### **2. Culture of Caring**

One of the explicit goals of the Institute was to support ECEs to trust that the values and skills of their practice have a significant contribution to make to broader community leadership. Rather than training people in a particular set of Leadership Skills from other sectors, the Institute was designed to enable participants to acknowledge and build on their existing leadership skills.

Considerable effort went into making the Institute welcoming, supportive and 'a safe place for critical conversation'. As one participant commented "*The tone and energy... was upbeat and supportive.*"

In addition to reflecting this goal in the Institute's content and processes – ECEBC worked hard to demonstrate a culture of caring in the logistical arrangements for the Institute. Significant effort went into travel and hotel arrangements, welcoming participants to the City, providing good meals, offering transit information and pre paid fares, and social activities.

While the Board Room at ECEBC offices was not ideal (small without windows) and not all meals worked for everyone, the effort to consistently reflect a culture of caring was not lost on participants. When asked about the things that worked for them, responses included:

*Assistance through every detail*

*Accommodations, friendliness, connections, snacks*

*Accommodations, travel, food, goodies, expertise, knowledge*

*I have never travelled to the 'bigger city' and it was very organized in a professional way.*

*How well we were taken care of- thanks!*

Another aspect of the 'culture of caring' was reflected in the relationships that participants established with each other. As one participant put it. *"Knowing that you are not alone – can be a powerful thing. Then, knowing that there is a network of passionate people you can refer to is even more powerful.*

This suggests that a 'cohort model' (keeping the same group of ECEs together over the course of the year) is an important element of the Initiative and should continue.

In summary, one participant's feedback comments speak eloquently to the Institute's ability to demonstrate that a culture of caring IS leadership.

*I didn't expect ... to be validated in a redefined model of leadership. I have been surprised and so pleased to be shown that our "ECE way" can be used effectively in the broader community and that we don't need to try to lead in a way that isn't me.*

*(The Institute) modelled a leadership style that is effective and powerful without being intimidating. The skills and empathy you model show that leadership can be balanced.*

### **3. Integrated Content and Process**

As noted above and reflected in the Agenda, the Institute was designed to integrate 3 core strands.

Content was delivered through a variety of processes, formats and activities so as to model different leadership approaches and skills. Whenever possible, participants were encouraged to consider the effectiveness of the 'process' used to deliver the 'content' so that they could integrate these strategies into their emerging leadership.

The Institute included presentations on a number of key leadership topics including:

- Diverse Perspectives on Leadership
- ECEBC's \$20 an Hour Strategy
- Framing Leadership Messages
- BC's Child Care Policy Landscape
- The Economics of Child Care

Participants also worked through large and small group activities specifically designed for the Institute on *Creating an ECE Culture of Leadership* and on *Community Project Development*.

Many participants valued the opportunity to work on their own community project in some detail and wished there had been more time to share ideas about their projects with other teams.

Creative and innovative approaches were also integrated into the Institute, including:

- Art Therapy Approaches – This approach built on existing ECE practice skills. Lorraine de la Morrandiere, an Art Therapist, designed and facilitated activities for participants to use art materials to express their emerging leadership gifts. Over the course of the Institute, the group created a wall mural and personal Touchstones to take home. For some, the use of art pushed their comfort zone. For others, it was an important creative outlet.
- Story Telling – This approach also built on existing ECE practice skills. Richard van Camp, a master Aboriginal story teller, spent an afternoon with the group sharing stories and encouraging participants to see the power in their stories. This was a highlight of the Institute for many participants.
- Outreach Visits – Teams of participants from each community made outreach visits to 10 individuals in Metro Vancouver. The purpose was to provide participants with a place to practice explaining their projects to others and to receive feedback from supportive, knowledgeable individuals. A number of very positive connections were made and the visits were a highlight for many participants.

While individual participants found some activities challenging, for the most part they responded very positively to the holistic nature of the experience rather than to individual elements of the Institute. Things that worked for them included:

*The whole process. Presentations were very informative, resources were easily understood. ...Facilitators were approachable and understanding.*

*...the whole experience. It is apparent that a lot of thought and planning went into the event.*

*There isn't anything I would change. All the discussions were very helpful, All the speakers were phenomenal.*

*The flow. The content - an amazing process to work through the entire week.*

*The variety of activities, sharing of experiences and stories, meeting resource people from the community and having an opportunity to look at our own projects.*

*The content of the program – informative, different voices, reflecting back our common beliefs and values to gain new works to express our profession.*

*Fantastic content – lots of information but not overwhelming.*

*Variety of learning activities – verbal, power point, hand outs, group activities, field trip. The keynote speakers were awesome – informative, interesting, relevant.*

*The thought and organization. The variety of presenters/presentations. Logical progression of skills.*

*Amazingly, wonderful, memorable, rewarding, exhilarating, emotional, reflective experience.*

#### **4. Links to Community Projects**

The biggest lessons for ECEBC relate to the relationship between the Community of Innovation Projects and the Leadership Institute.

It is evident that one of the key strengths of the Institute is that it was not a stand alone ‘training event’. Rather, the community projects were integrated into the Institute and continue to provide the living context for the development of participants’ leadership capacity.

Participants were supported to apply their learning to their specific project. And, they know they will continue to receive support through the Leadership Initiative and will have the opportunity to participate in two more leadership events.

Participants report that, as a result of their experience at the Institute, they are returning to their communities with increased confidence to play leadership roles in their community’s project.

However, it became clear leading up to and during the Institute that not all participants were equally involved in the initial development of their Community’s Project and that not all participants were equally involved in the community group that was expected to lead the project

There are a number of factors that contributed to this situation including:

- the relatively short time line for community applications
- ECEBC’s openness to receive community proposals that were not yet fully developed
- the under-representation of front line ECEs at many community early childhood tables
- the lack of understanding that this is not a traditional ‘grant’ program
- the ECEBC focus on ‘emerging leaders’.

While the resulting challenges can and will be resolved, this experience will help ECEBC rework some aspects of our approach to seeking and selecting Communities of Innovation.

Specifically, in the future we will more clearly and explicitly work to:

- articulate the relationship between Community Projects and the Leadership Institutes
- create the expectation that project ideas will evolve and change at the Institute
- define 'emerging leaders' and their on-going role in community projects
- provide sufficient time for communities to engage in an inclusive process

These are precisely the kind of lessons that ECEBC expected and hoped to learn during the first year of our Leadership Initiative and we look forward to incorporating them into our future plans.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

There is no question that the Leadership Institute met and exceeded our expectations. The participants' level of engagement and commitment; the calibre of the presentations; the diversity of approaches and activities and the ability to integrate and model a culture of caring as a key component of leadership all contributed to its success.

ECEBC is now focused on developing effective ways to support Institute participants and their communities to proceed with their exciting projects.

Through work with participants at the Institute, ECEBC has developed Budget and Work Plan Templates that communities will complete over the next month. These will form the basis of a contract between ECEBC and the Community Project Sponsoring Registered Charities to whom the funds will flow.

Our Leadership Coordinator will be in regular contact with Institute Participants to support their leadership, to provide additional resources, and, with them, to shape the next Leadership Event in May, 2009 to meet their needs. She will work with participants to support their ability to talk about the Institute and their leadership journeys in their own voices.

Through the ECEBC Journal and Website and upcoming workshops, we will keep members and the broader community updated on the Leadership Initiative.

We thank VanCity Community Foundation for your on-going support of this important initiative. We are confident that this is the work we need to do!