

# How can I, as an Early Childhood Educator, have a positive impact on the families that come to the Launch Pad?

Stacey Fraser

## Biography

Stacey has worked in the field of early childhood education for eighteen years. During this time she has had various teaching experiences in child care with infants/toddlers groups, preschoolers and school age before going on to the parent child drop-in resource centre. Working in the drop-in centre for over ten years has given Stacey the opportunity to work with parents, caregivers and children at the Eastdale Drop-in Resource centre and now with the Launch Pad at Echo Place School.

## Abstract

*My question started with the focus of self help skills but then blossomed, to encompass many other aspects of the program that included circle time, snack time arts and crafts and many of the other areas throughout the day. Overall I wanted to ensure that everyone, parents, caregivers and children, had a positive experience when they came to the Launch Pad and what could I do to make that happen. I started to realize that the more positive attention I gave to the children, (especially) the more they wanted it. The more positive their experiences at the school setting in the Launch Pad then that experience would then be carried over to a positive feeling about school altogether and into kindergarten.*

## The Beginning

It seemed to all start first thing when you greet people when they arrive at your centre. A smile, a 'good morning' and 'how are you' and most importantly, 'I'm glad to see you today.' This was the start of the positive attention that everyone gets when they visit our Launch Pad at Echo Place School. I Focus on something positive about the child or the parent or just provide a positive, comfortable place to be accepted for who you are. Everyone needs that to feel good about themselves. I found that some days were busy and hectic and I didn't take the time to have that positive interaction with people. This is when I would notice more attention seeking behaviour because you want any attention if not positive. You notice that children may not do the craft if no one is there to notice how wonderful it is. Snack has a real purpose other than food when you give children positive attentions for good manners, cleaning up after themselves, being friendly with their peers and a lot of other things as well. Every activity has a purpose. There is the actual learning part as well as the self-esteem building. Teacher attention is very important for successful programs.

Information about Launch Pads say that the child's brain needs to be stimulated before the age of 6 to be fully developed and ready to learn. This stimulation is best done by the parents. The Launch Pad programs give the child another adult that they can be stimulated by and that is the ECE teacher that runs the program. This positive interaction also is a beautiful example for the

parents and the caregivers to follow. Positive attention is not always something that comes automatically or easily for many people. When you have another adult providing that example for you on an informal basis I believe that it will be adapted quicker and more effortlessly.

(1)The Fraser-Mustard Early Years Study is the best evidence of how important these years are to the children and to the parents.

It tells us what needs to be done and provides recommendations on how to do it.

### **Some recommendations of the Early Years Study:**

#### **PARENTING PROGRAMS**

Provide parents with awareness, support, and skills for the early development of their children.

#### **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

Encourage parents and educators to learn ways to nurture their children and develop responsive relationships between adults and children.

#### **PARENT PARTICIPATION IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

Encourage parent participation in play and learning programs for children for interactive and supportive learning both for adults and children, and to encourage parents to take a more active role with children's play and reading in the home.

#### **SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN**

Create programs and spaces where children of all backgrounds and abilities will feel loved and valued — this will stimulate brain development, learning, and self-confidence.

#### **PLAY-BASED LEARNING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN**

Organize programs and training for play-based problem-solving learning for young children, guided by early educators and parents. This includes community play groups for parents, caregivers and young children, and ongoing early childhood development programs.

#### **RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

Start toy and resource libraries, nutrition programs, and cultural events for children, including things such as mobile toy and book lending libraries, theme-based learning/play kits for children.

#### **FOCUS ON FAMILY NEEDS**

Provide families at risk with information and referral services, prenatal and postnatal support, home visitation networks, access to health care, family counseling and support to home care providers.

#### **FAMILIES AT RISK**

Make special efforts to engage and encourage the most isolated families to participate and benefit from the program.

#### **COMMUNITY LINKS**

Link the early childhood development activities and family programs to other activities and cultural events in the community, to include children as an important part of the social structure.

#### **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY**

Engage in ongoing advocacy and public awareness at a community and political level to highlight the importance of early childhood development.

To download a complete copy of the Early Years Study, visit the Ontario Ministry of Education Website.

## The Process

I found that the more I gave the attention, the more it was being sought out by the children. So when I was busy doing one thing I was called by the children to come and do the activity with the children or to look and see what they had done. Some days were a constant calling of my name by certain children. The parent would say that they talk about me all the time at home. They like to sing the Tidy-up Song when it is time to tidy up. They sing the Please and Thank You song when they have dinner or a snack. One child would only get her coat on by doing the coat flip over the head the way that I showed her. She had a sense of accomplishment and she enjoyed the attention I gave her when she did it so well and got ready to go home all on her own.

Caregivers would come back to the centre and tell me that they use the transition songs in their programs. The children enjoy the opening song for circle time. They know how to sing it, also how to do all the actions that go along with it. Circle time is a great time to give positive attention to the children related to the activities being done. These include a variety of activities that are outlined in the (2) "Early Years Reading and Math Strategies for Parents" written by Lynda Flanagan, Ruth Mills and Pat Smith for the Grand Erie District School Board. One specific thing that I do at every circle when I get a book out to read, is ask everyone to look at the book cover and tell me what they think the book is about. I get some pretty interesting ideas and some of the suggestions are right on. Some of the children that are already in kindergarten are able to read the title to me. These answers are always followed by "very good", or "that is a great idea" then I tell them what the title is and I read the story. We talk about the pictures, look for specifics in the illustrations, and many times someone will say "hey, that rhymes". Some of the other things we do include "Textured writing" "We're on a Roll" "Bean Bag Toss" "Clue" from the Early Years Reading and Math Strategies. I have found all of these things that we already do in our group circles can just as easily be done at the table area with one or more children in a small setting where the interactions can be so special and meaningful between the adult and the child. These are excellent opportunities for boosting self-esteem, enhancing and developing certain skills.

## Analyzing the Information

After one amazing circle time where everyone really enjoyed themselves and seemed to get a lot out of it, my co-worker said "that was amazing how everyone did the activities and kept wanting to do more". I told her that it really makes a difference if the parent or caregiver takes part in the circle, participating with the child and then giving the child the positive attention for their role. It really is a combined effort of the adults, the children and the teacher. That is why sometimes the circle is a disaster. People talk and really don't pay attention what the child is doing and accomplishing. One caregiver (Yvonne Parry) always comments about how wonderful the circle was and how the children really enjoy it and get a lot out of it. That is why sometimes I would notice the adults not involved and I would have to do something to get them involved. This could mean asking the child to have the adult help them specifically or change to a different activity that may provide more interaction. The participation of adults in circle time is something that I mention in the monthly newsletter when I find that it is needed. I outline what circle time is about and what we hope that the children get out of it. I also mention what the adults can do to help me make it more successful, enjoyable and a better learning experience for everyone. A lot of times adults don't

know what the children learn or what skills they are developing by the activities that we do unless you tell them.

## **Findings**

I found that every interaction I had with parents, caregiver and children during the day was an important one. It could be the morning greeting, the one on one activity, the group circle time, the information in the newsletter, the interaction during snack and craft time. All these positive times make a real difference in the lives of those that you connect with.

## **Next Step**

My next step will be to continue to find new ways to build meaningful relationships with the participants in our program. To help the adults see that the positive attentions given to their children make a huge difference in their self-esteem. I know that it is important to welcome new people into the program with the same warmth and positive regard that others already feel and ensure everyone leaves the Launch Pad feeling that they had a positive experience.

## **References:**

Early Years Reading and Math Strategies for Parents, Grand Erie District School Board 2005

Mustard, J. F. & McCain, M.N. (1999) Early Years Study, Final Report. Toronto: Government of Ontario