

AUGUST 2020

STRENGTHENING EARLY YEARS TO K TRANSITIONS

MAKING CONNECTIONS: BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS
FINAL REPORT
2019-2020

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1. BACKGROUND

In 2018-19, the Ministry of Education piloted *Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten Transitions* (SEY2KT), a multi-partner initiative focused on improving early learning experiences and transition processes for BC children. Based on results of a successful pilot in six district/community sites in 2019-20, the Ministry expanded the initiative to twelve sites.

SEY2KT reflected key themes that emerged from eight regional sessions. Sessions were held across BC in 2017 with over 1500 participants. These sessions identified the following needs:

- Increase the use of restorative transition policies and practices that are strength-based, child & family-focused, holistic, and emphasize the importance of cultural identity
- Establish a local context for partnership, strong relationships, and collaboration in planning and decision-making
- Include children and families in the collaboration process as well as a broad range of professionals that the family identifies as critical to include
- Work collaboratively to increase the exchange of knowledge, experiences and information about transition practices and experiences. Ongoing communities of practice – at every level
- Identify and address the barriers in ‘both systems’ and determine what would be enabling conditions (e.g. shared pedagogical practices, joint professional learning opportunities)

Additionally, SEY2KT was grounded in research findings from OECD (2015):

OECD research: Transitions from Early Childhood Education to Primary School

The transition from early childhood education to primary school is a big step for all children, and a step that more and more children have to take. Quality transitions should be well prepared and child-centred, managed by trained staff collaborating with one another, and guided by an appropriate and aligned curriculum. Transitions like these enhance the likelihood that the positive impacts of early learning and care will last through primary school and beyond.

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OECD research: Successful Transforming Education Jurisdictions embrace a 'Learning Leadership' model

Successfully transforming education jurisdictions embrace a 'learning leadership' model where all system partners work collaboratively to shift programs, policies, and practices simultaneously in thoughtful and sustainable ways. The Ministry of Education becomes a collaborative learning partner; rather than an 'authority' over field processes (OECD, 2015)

With the publication of revised Early Learning Framework (2019), SEY2KT increased the focus on on-going collaborative professional learning in order to better support children and their families as they transition from community-based early care and learning to kindergarten contexts.

PATHWAYS AND LIVING INQUIRIES:

The accompanying infographic is a form of documentation that fuses the Early Learning Framework's philosophy around Pathways and Living Inquiries with the SEY2KT research indicators and voices from one of our Project Teams.

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PATHWAYS AND LIVING INQUIRIES: ONE TEAM PLANS A SEY2KT PLAY SESSION

Learning is not an individual act but happens in relationship with people, materials, and place. All aspects of children's learning and growing are interconnected and overlapping. There are no pre-set ways to engage with...living inquiries, instead, pedagogy should be grounded in the place, land, families, histories, and cultures of local communities. (Early Learning Framework, p.65)



ACCESSIBILITY AND FOCUSED LOCAL CONTEXT

Throughout our meetings with our Aboriginal department and the Keginow outreach worker, the importance of the First People's Principles of Learning was echoed. Our meetings reiterated how important it is to listen to collaborate with the Indigenous community so that reciprocal relationships of trust are fostered.

FAMILY AND CHILD CENTERED TRANSITIONS

The importance of continued relationships, beyond a one-time event is critical in ensuring trust is established, maintained and continued. As our understanding of this deepened, we recognized the importance of developing an ongoing collaboration with this community so that opportunities to learn, share and meet together are planned over time.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL-BASED EARLY LEARNING

We recognized the importance of honouring the role of Indigenous knowledge in understanding history, culture, stories and protocols as we met with our Indigenous partners. Collaboratively developing plans for the Pop-Up was integral to its success. Sharing our plans with elders and advisors and ensuring that their voices were heard and honoured was extremely important..

PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY

We learned a tremendous amount about the complex history and challenges our Indigenous families have had to navigate. The importance of trust, consistency, authenticity, and the willingness to listen to understand was shared with us. The smudging ceremony was an opportunity to clear any negative energy from our space and start building the foundations of trust.



FLEXIBILITY: LOCAL COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Our understanding of the importance of outreach was also enhanced as we discussed the barriers for families to participate with schools (trust, trauma) and learned how challenging it is for some families to enter schools due to past trauma..

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2. RESEARCH PROCESS

In order to provide the sustained attention and time needed to create change in long established practices and relationships, The Ministry invited the original six districts/communities to continue their participation into the second year of the study and identified a further six to join them. Both continuing and new sites were expected to engage in



collaborative inquiry focused on a specific community and to document their approaches and activities on a regular basis. They were asked to offer evidence of increased emphasis and improvements in:

- transitions that are family and child-centred
- ongoing, effective and timely communication
- collaboration to strengthen coherence between community and school-based Early Years services
- pedagogical continuity between the Early Years sector and Primary Education
- flexibility to take in to account local community strengths and challenges
- accessibility to quality, child-centred learning, focused within the local context

MONTHLY SHARING

Each month, project teams completed a record of their collaborations and submitted it to the project researcher. They include photographs and other artefacts (e.g., invitations, meeting agendas, notes, plans, charts, comments from participants) as appropriate. Most project teams were also able to provide a summary report at the end of the year, using the same format.

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MONTHLY SHARING:
COMMUNITY SAMPLE

ACTIONS

OBSERVATIONS

UNDERSTANDING

PLAN

WHAT DID YOU DO?

WE MET AS A TEAM:

- REFLECTED ON OUR KINDERGARTEN GRADUAL ENTRY (KGE) AT HOLLYBURN: ECE SUPPORTED IN K CLASSROOM FOR GRADUAL ENTRY; PARENTS GATHERED IN STRONG START ROOM.
- REFINED OUR INQUIRY QUESTION, BROAD STRATEGY (INVITING FAMILIES IN, GOING OUT TO CONNECT, ECE/PRIMARY TEACHERS SHARED PRO-D), AND SPECIFIC ACTIONS AND TIMELINE

WHAT HAPPENED?

AT KGE:

- ON DAY 1, 16 PARENTS AND 3 SIBLINGS (FROM A K CLASS OF 20) CAME AND HAD COFFEE, CONVERSATIONS IN THE STRONG START ROOM
- ON DAY 2 AND DAY 3, 3 PARENTS STAYED
- PARENTS REPORTED THAT THEY WEREN'T SURE WHAT TO DO WITH THEMSELVES AFTER DROP OFF (ESPECIALLY ON THE FIRST DAY), AND THIS WAS A NICE TRANSITION, A WAY TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS; THEY REALIZED THEY WEREN'T ALONE ("IT WAS LIKE, OH YAH, YOU FEEL THE SAME TOO!")
ECE AND K TEACHER REPORTED IT FELT CALMER AND MORE MANAGEABLE WITH 2 ADULTS. THERE WAS MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS AND THEY GOT TO KNOW THE CHILDREN BETTER.

WHAT DID YOU DISCOVER/LEARN?

- OUR TEAM HAS A DIVERSE AND COMPLIMENTARY SKILL SET AND EACH INDIVIDUAL OFFERS A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE, THAT DRIVES OUR DISCUSSION AND PLANNING FORWARD.
- WE LEARNED THAT WE NOT ONLY WANT TO FOCUS ON CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE, BUT ALSO TO PLACE.
- WE HAVE A LOT OF FUN TOGETHER!

WHAT'S NEXT?

- OUR TEAM HAS PREPARED A YEAR PLAN AND A CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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RESEARCH PROCESS

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Project teams used the following outline to choose their focus for self-assessment and reflect on their progress. These priority areas were identified in the 2018-19 pilot as critical to progress and change. Project teams were asked to focus on just two areas; they offered evidence and continued planning for change throughout the year. Some teams used the same outline to guide discussions at meetings with their community partners.

Most project teams were able to complete the assessment at least twice, although as in all 2019-20 data collection, efforts were curtailed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are a well-functioning and committed **TEAM**.

We have an explicit common **PURPOSE** that focuses all our work.

We have informed and supportive **DISTRICT LEADERSHIP**.

We are building **RELATIONSHIPS** with individual families.

We are **CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY**.

We bring a sense of **JOY** to this work!

PROVINCIAL GATHERINGS AND CHECK INS

Representatives from the twelve project teams met for a day in October to plan and share ideas. After the onset of COVID-19 in Spring 2020, representatives from the project teams participated in regular ZOOM meetings to provide updates, learn about Ministry of Education plans, and participate in professional learning on Compassionate Leadership.

“ WE LEARNED THAT THERE IS A SHARED VISION OF CARE BETWEEN MANY ORGANIZATIONS IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT IT COMES DOWN TO RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST.

”

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RESEARCH PROCESS

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Data files were developed for each of the twelve sites, including monthly reports, self-analyses, and a variety of artefacts (e.g., communications to the community, photographs, videos and presentations, and internal summaries and reports). Some data collection was curtailed by COVID-19 protocols and adjustments (e.g., some community partners were unable to participate in activities after mid-March; some district/community project teams were unable to collaborate on a final reports; and it was not feasible to collect district/community responses in June).

The twelve sites varied in many ways, including their experience and background with early childhood education and with community relationships. Some sites have a long history of successful community early childhood connections; others are just beginning to develop relationships among community and education partners. The project team developed the following broad framework to enable synthesis that recognized both the commonalities and the diversities among sites. Available information was entered into a project spreadsheet, and synthesized around four key themes:

GOING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY: IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS: WELCOMING FAMILIES INTO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS: DEVELOPING NEW WAYS OF INTERACTING

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICES: OFFERING QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN

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*Every ounce of connection we offer to parents and children
will enable us to be better partners.*

”

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3. PARTICIPANTS

On each monthly report, project teams reported on the number of people and groups involved. The number of people involved depended on a number of factors:

- It takes time to develop community comfort and expectations; generally, project teams in their second year had more participants than those in the first year
- Participation reflects accessibility – some communities have established connections that encourages high participation; others have geographic or other factors that limit participation – and in some cases, it is a matter of trial and error



Truthfully, I was expecting to see more preschool aged children than we did. Some parents indicated that the pop ups were challenging to get to as they were far and transportation seems to be a barrier. Perhaps if we do one at Newton Food Bank they will be able to attend pop ups in the Newton Area as they would be closer. Many families didn't bring their young children due to the challenges with transportation.



- As project teams focus more and more on inclusion, and in making connections with families that have not previously participated, the numbers are lower at first
- In terms of partners, some communities have well-established community tables or Centres that include many partners; others are at beginning stages.
- Often it is not possible to determine how many participants were included in virtual experiences – for example, when there is no specific physical space, large numbers of children may be viewing and participating without the project team being able to count them

SEY2KT involved a large number of people throughout the community and the education system. The following estimates are based on monthly reports:

- **Educators:** ECEs, teachers, administrators, Indigenous educators (including language teachers) School trustees (est. 150)
- **Community partners:** (est. 90) . Some participated in one activity (e.g., planning a community event; others were regular members of the community team.
 - Note that some of these are individuals; others are teams from larger organizations/coalitions.
 - e.g., local agencies; outreach workers; day cares, MCFD; Seniors homes; Adult education, Medical-physio and OT, Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association; Kekinow Indigenous Housing; City Council
- **Children:** est.1600 from K, Strong Start, community ECE programs, Parks and recreation; community events and activities (e.g., Food Bank; aquarium; Friendship Centres; malls)
- **Families:** 900 (see above)



Columbia Valley Pioneer
5 hrs · 🌐

A school bus with kindergarten teachers is driving around the community today to meet their new 2021 students. Carter, 5, was thrilled by the visit and the bag of school supplies they provided.



READY, SET, PLAY!

IS YOUR CHILD STARTING KINDERGARTEN AT GEORGE JAY IN SEPTEMBER? YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND ANY OF THE SESSIONS BELOW!



<p>Well-Being & Belonging</p> <p>Wed April 15, 2020 3:15-4:15 PM at George Jay Elementary School</p>	<p>Interacting with Others, Materials & Our World</p> <p>Tues May 12, 2020 3:15-4:15 PM at George Jay Elementary School</p>	<p>Communication & Literacies</p> <p>Thur June 4, 2020 3:15-4:15 PM at George Jay Elementary School</p>
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Free! Registration Required

New kindergarten students and a caregiver are invited to attend one, two or all three sessions. Each session includes: meeting teachers, snack, activities and playtime. No siblings please, as space is limited. To register, please visit: tinyurl.com/sbyxuf9



COME PLAY & LEARN WITH US!

"Play is like fertilizer for brain growth" - Stuart Brown

Weds, Jan 29 | 1:00-2:30 - West Vancouver Memorial Library
 Weds, Feb 12 | 10:00-12:00 - John Lawson Park
 Weds, Mar 11 | 1:00-2:30 - West Vancouver Memorial Library
 Sat, Apr 25 | 10:30-12:00 - West Vancouver Community Centre

Come join us for a free series of pop-up play events, hosted



Infinite Possibilities: Play and Learning in the Early Years

Do you work with children 0-8 years old?

Join us for a 3 part series as we explore and connect the NEW BC Early Learning Framework to holistic joyful learning experiences, spaces and opportunities in our local context.

All Early Childhood Educators and K-9 teachers welcome!

Hosted by the West Vancouver Community Centre in partnership with West Vancouver School District and West Vancouver Memorial Library.

Special guest presenters include Shannon Ozirny (WVML), Heather Fraser (Saglings Outdoor Program), Mary Parackal (WVSD) & Alison de Boer (WVSD)

Location:
 VCH Garden Room, Main Floor
 West Vancouver Community Centre

- Child care will be available!
- ECE professional development certificates will be available

Please RSVP to Alex Sweeney by Jan 17, 2020: asweeney@wvschools.ca

Please indicate if you will require child care as spaces are limited.



POP UP PLAY

JOIN SD 70 FAMILY HUB & PARTNERS AS WE EXPLORE AND PLAY!

JAN 18 - LITERACY ALBERNI 10:00-12:00 (5100 TEBB AVE)
 FEB 1 - FAMILY LITERACY DAY CELEBRATION @ ECHO CENTRE 10-12 (4255 WALLACE ST)
 FEB 18 - CELEBRATE FAMILY DAY AT EJ DUNN GYM 3:00-5:00 (3500 ARGYLE ST)
 FEB 27 - ECHO VILLAGE SENIOR CENTRE 6:00-7:30 (4200 10 AVE)
 MARCH 12 - PORT ALBERNI CITY HALL 3-5 (4850 ARGYLE ST)
 APRIL 2 - PORT ALBERNI FRIENDSHIP CENTER- 11-1 (3555 4 AVE)
 APRIL 18 - WILLIAMSON PARK- 4-6 (5081 BISHOP AVE)
 MAY 14 - FIR PARK VILLAGE SENIOR CENTRE 6:00-7:30 (1411 WALLACE ST)
 MAY 28 - WEAVER PARK- 4-6 (2150 5 AVE)
 JUNE 11 - GYRO REC PARK- 4-6 (3245 7 AVE)

Find us on Facebook for more info: [@ey2kpopplay](https://www.facebook.com/ey2kpopplay)
 EARLY YEARS TO KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS (EY2K)

PHONE: 250-724-0278 EMAIL: kcharbonneau@sd70.bc.ca

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4. WHAT WE LEARNED

OVERVIEW

- Relationships are at the heart of everything we do. SEY2KT is not focused on a single act of “transition” – it’s about making connections and developing relationships among families and communities.
- Project Teams that reported strong satisfaction and success were characterized by an emphasis on:
 - Developing genuine connections with community partners.
 - Going out into the community to include as many families as possible.
 - Learning about the gifts that partners and families offered, and listening to their experiences and wisdom.
 - Designing activities that enabled families to come into the school for activities that were important to them.
 - Offering quality experiences for young children tailored to the strengths and values of the community.
 - Ensuring that **all** children and families had the resources they needed to fully participate.
 - Connecting all of the people involved in offering quality early experiences and beginning to work toward a community of practice.
 - Valuing the experiences and support young children receive in both traditional and non-traditional settings.
 - Being patient – taking time to get to know their community and to let the community get to know the school community.

GOING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

Groups often talked about the importance of interacting with all children and families – including those who may have traditionally been described as “hard to reach.” They pointed out that when educators ask, “**What can we offer that would work for you?**” more families are able to participate. For example, some of them noted that traditional after-school programs do not work for everyone, so offering some evening experiences can help. Identifying places in the community that are easily accessible to families who do not have transportation also increased participation, as did providing activities and supervision for older children so that families didn’t have to divide their attention. Some Project Teams who offered ‘pop-up play’ sessions at Food Banks identified the sites as well-attended.

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WHAT WE LEARNED

Project Teams recognized that responses varied from one community to another. For example, one group presented a Pop-up Play at a food bank, and had only one child attend. However, there was an enthusiastic response from all of the adults who gathered around to watch the “play” and that helped to build trust and make connections for subsequent activities. Another group brought “gift bags” for the children and the response was so overwhelming that they ran out of materials in the first hour. In another setting, no children appeared, so the group spent their time talking with the adults there who were extremely interested. One of the adults commented,

“What you are doing is good. We don't like to send our children to people we don't know.”

The outreach through Food Banks and other community sites offered a point of access to other services for many families.



One mother shared her story of becoming a widow and how challenging she is finding things. She was able to learn about community partners who can support her family while talking with staff. The opportunity for her child to play while she shared her story with others allowed her to form an immediate connection with others. She stayed for an extended period of time as she was able to see her child enjoying the play activities, while feeling comfortable enough to talk with staff.

Going out into the community and interacting with families emphasized the need to tailor resources and offer services that could increase accessibility. One team that offered Pop-up Play at a food bank noted, *we encountered complex needs we had not anticipated; we need to have support available for language, hearing, and translation.* They had planned for 75 participants, and had gift bags prepared; there was a line-up when they started and *all the bags were gone in the first hour.*

**Pop-up Play is impromptu play that is set up in different locales and with various materials that encourage creativity and personal design.*

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WHAT WE LEARNED

It is important to recognize that going out into the community was not an immediate success, but with time, the connections strengthened, and people began to see the community/district Project Teams as part of the community. They not only helped to engage more families, but also emphasized that young children were a valued part of the community. For example, community members began to look for the “pop-up plays” and ask, *Are you coming to the aquarium this year?, Will you be in the park?* In some cases, community newspapers sent photographers – for example, to a pop-up play during a City Council meeting. While the specific activities and participation varied, communities of all sizes participated in Pop-ups and other activities, and took pride in their connections to the early learners.



“

The Seniors Centre Pop up was amazing. We really have no words to describe how meaningful it was to the residents. They were fully engaged and the children made many wonderful connections.

”

WELCOMING FAMILIES INTO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Several Project Teams extended or developed strategies for having young children and families join in activities in the school. Families reported that they appreciated these activities, *it helped me know what to expect when he goes to school and that their children were extremely enthusiastic about going to school with the big kids.* K/1 children enjoyed showing preschool children around. *Children were engaged and happy. They quickly immersed in activities and all ages played together with no barriers.*

“

The teachers have noticed a growing feeling of connection and community with the Strong Start families and K/1 students. For example, a grade 1 class was on the playground, they noticed a family from Strong Start and they went to say hi and ask the child to play. We're noticing that the simple things are helping to build relationships and connections in a meaningful way.

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WHAT WE LEARNED

Project Teams provided families with a regular schedule and activities were tailored to the local community. Activities included:

- “Play in the K” (one K visit made bird feeders and walked in forest to decorate a tree)
- Daycare buddies – shared play time at Strong Start and Child Care Centre
- SEY2KT portal with links to art, music and other resources
- Drumming, singing and cultural circle (led by someone from the local Friendship Centre (specifically Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association)
- Family Friday in the gym
- Early Primary Choir every Friday (SS; K/1)
- KinderSpark
- Rhymes Alive
- Virtual Strong Start
- Songs and rhymes in school library 9:15-10:15 including families, support staff, K’s
- Networking nights (ECEs and families)



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Tonight we were back in the Learning Lab. The room was set up and we waited for our families to arrive. Our first family arrived at 6:10 – we were starting to wonder if the good weather tuckered families out. After that they all started arriving! Our group tonight was much busier than usual. And different children than usual! After one child had difficulty leaving the program at the end, we discussed that perhaps ending with a short circle would be an easier transition.


”

COVID-19 pushed some Project Teams to find new ways of connecting, for example, virtual strong start sessions and a “virtual concert series” that included performers for young children (note: this was not strictly a SE2KT activity- but the planning group were involved in SEY2KT.)



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WHAT WE LEARNED




Pop Up and Play

Join us as we pop-up in different neighbourhoods around Port Alberni, the West Coast, and Bamfield. We will offer many different play opportunities inside and outside for families and their children to participate in.

Come and play, make new friends, and meet community service providers and Kindergarten Teachers that will be present to answer any questions you have about your child's well-being.

Pacific Rim Children & Families About Our Programs Community Programs Tools Events



Helping families navigate early years services in the Alberni Valley and the West Coast



Pacific Rim Children and Families on Facebook Watch
 Welcome to Night 1 of our Virtual Summer Concert Series! We are excited to have Nuu-chah-nulth Cultural Educator Aaron Watts open up the ...
 @facebook.com

SD 70 Pacific Rim Children & Families PRESENTS

Virtual Summer Concert Series

08 15 22 29 05 12 19	Aaron Watts Gerry Barnum Marim Bam Buzz Kendra Neary Cat Sass Shutter Charlotte Diamond	Nuu-chah-nulth Singer/Songw Merimba Acoustic Cover Band Alternative Ro Children's Mus
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Time: 6:30 pm
 Location: Pacific Rim & Families
 Facebook Page: @pacifrimchildren



WWW.PACIFICRIMCHILDREN.CA

“

Our K transitions have taken a hit with social distancing, but we are trying to be creative in ways to maintain connection. We met as a Early Years team to discuss ways to connect personally and virtually with families. The social-emotional well-being of our children and families ant this time is of utmost importance to us. We are using our FaceBook page as our forum – Pacific Rim Children and Families - please join in and follow us.

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WHAT WE LEARNED

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS



Community partners bring many gifts. They offer expertise, skills, materials, programs and perspectives that may not be available in the school. And they have a deep desire to work closely with the schools.



The SEY2KT teams developed extensive processes for consulting and collaborating with community partners. For example, some of the teams gathered information and views from families of current and prospective students; they worked with community partners to develop a collaborative vision and plan; they invited collaboration in organizing and conducting activities (e.g., developing materials, workshops and experiences); they worked together to assess and refine their activities. In reporting on their experiences, they often emphasized the importance of

- realizing how passionately everyone wanted to be a part of strengthening opportunities for the community's children
- taking time to listen to all of the voices, for example, one group reported that introductions at one meeting with 40 people took a long time, and concluded, *And that was a good thing. We needed to get to know each other.*
- ensuring that all interactions were a two-way conversation, not the “school” telling everyone else what to do
- valuing the gifts that every single person and agency brought
- making space for social interactions; for example, many groups incorporated a meal into their planning days
- being careful that the program did not become too focused on schools
- engaging community partners in helping to ensure all children have access to quality programs – for example, ensuring appropriate clothing is available for outdoor activities; providing translators; finding sites that do not require car transportation



Relationships between families, schools and community partners are growing. We are connecting and building a sense of community that is stemming directly from this project.



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WHAT WE LEARNED

Some communities/districts created a formal structure of focus groups and Councils of Advisors, and conducted surveys to help guide their work; others operated more informally, relying on key links to the community. Some groups mentioned the value of having a member of the School District senior administration team involved. Often a member of the local Friendship Centre or the community Early Childhood Lead took a central role. In some cases, the District Early Learning Leads were invited by local Indigenous groups to attend meetings and early learning events where they learned about local resources.

Dinner meetings and discussions often focused on the question, *What can **we** do differently to build connections before children and families come to school? How can **we** improve access for families that have not yet connected with school or community programs?*

One Project Team commented on the strength that comes from developing shared goals and holding each other accountable.

“During these times we are coming together as a team and working towards supporting each other, our families and our children. Throughout this project we have learned that it is all about relationships. We are trying to do what we can, where we can. With our partnerships, collaboration and imagination we are moving forward and doing the best that we can

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE SUPPORTING QUALITY EXPERIENCES

Project Teams from different communities/districts came with a wide range of prior experiences. Some came from a long tradition of working collegially with other groups and educators, while others had previous opportunities to work with ECEs or others.

A key focus for many was developing common purpose and understanding around quality experiences for young children. In some cases, there were currently no systematic points of contact between ECEs and primary teachers, even when they both worked in the same building. In other places, there were well-established professional relationships. Time was a consistent barrier – for example, it was extremely challenging for ECEs to be part of some meetings and activities, because there was no-one to take over their classroom responsibilities.

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WHAT WE LEARNED

Project Teams were innovative and collaborated with community partners to reduce the barriers between different groups of educators, and to develop structures that could support collaborative practice. Their efforts often focused on ensuring that:

- Early childhood educators were invited to district professional learning events, and their participation was supported through release time and/or honoraria as needed
- Early childhood educators were consulted about opportunities, speakers, and activities that could be included on the district pro-d calendar
- Where appropriate, families were included in planning for district events
- All teachers were aware of and welcomed at professional learning events where they could learn more about young children
- Speakers and facilitators at district events were encouraged to include examples from early childhood education in all of their presentations
- The expertise of early childhood educators was valued
- Ongoing opportunities for connections and collaborative learning were embedded in the planning



One Project Team held a Strategies Fair for ECE's, Strong Start(SS) educators and K teachers; the Superintendent and other district community staff also attended. Each participant was asked to bring a strategy from their work to share with others. Strategies and groups included: iStory workshop; Loose parts; SEL sensory tools; Indigenous Curriculum of the Sechelt Nation; Puppetry/Indigenous focus/Singing, Song & Soundmaking (District Principal of Indigenous Education); Family Navigator; Outdoor Play; YMCA; Inclusion technology; Connecting to Place; Vancouver Coastal Health Speech and Language Pathologists and School District team: Occupational therapist.

Other groups organized:

- a professional development series for ECEs and primary teachers
- release time for ECEs and primary teachers to visit community agencies (and to visit each other)
- *Communities of Practice* dinners for ECEs and teachers
- Sessions on Value of Play and on the Early Learning Framework at district events were offered .5day inservice for educators including K, preschool, Strong Start
- meetings with ECEs from Child Care and EY centres to plan collaborative pro-d

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5. MOVING FORWARD

For most Project Teams, SEY2KT 2019-20 was an unqualified success. While many plans could not be realized within this school year because of COVID-19, participants often noted that “the hard work is done- it will be easy to get started again because we now have relationships”. Overall, groups demonstrated a powerful level of commitment to increasing accessibility, building the connections and developing the relationships needed to support and enhance quality experiences for young children.

“

*WE LOVE THIS PROJECT!!!
We knew we did, but it keeps
getting reinforced over and over.*

”

What did we discover from participating in the Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten Transition project?

RELATIONSHIPS ARE EVERYTHING

It takes time to build trust and strengthen relationships, but it is a step that cannot be skipped! SEY2K allowed school district staff, community and StrongStart ECEs, and kindergarten teachers to have meaningful conversations about our shared values connected with the process of transitioning into school for families.

A group's discovery around relationships

