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LEADERS & LEARNERS

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SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS/L'ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DES ADMINISTRATEURS ET DES
ADMINISTRATRICES SCOLAIRES

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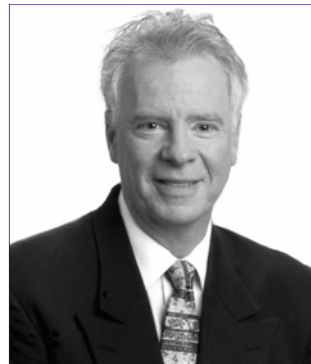
Upcoming CASA Events

- Annual Conference, October 13-15, 2006, Winnipeg
- Summer Leadership Academy, July 2007, Whitehorse

Details on CASA events will be posted at www.casa-acas.ca.

Message From The President: Examining Early Childhood Education Methods

There are few more enticing sounds than the unhampered laughter of young children at play. Complemented by that look of wonder when a new discovery is made, we have witnessed one of the foundations of healthy childhood.



Bob Mills
CASA president

The new emphasis now being given to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the various models being advocated stems from three particular sources.

They are:

- the ever-increasing body of research into the immediate and long-term societal benefits of such initiatives
- the socio-economic factor of a radically changed workforce taking the majority of mothers away from the home
- the sense of responsibility of public and private educational institutions to make sure that quality learning and developmental opportunities are offered as soon as possible

There is no question that across North America, we are in the midst of a burgeoning de-

mand for more effective and research-based ECE programs.

This demand is for far more than custodial daycare service. More and more, the expectation is that children will enter the school system "ready to learn," equipped with basic literacy and numeracy skills.

The current trend to examine different curriculum models and to promote their use as a guarantee that children will enter public school ready to learn must be reviewed carefully. Adopting such models on a compulsory basis can potentially lower the professional creativity and responsibility of pre-school educators.

It remains clear, however, that the following elements form the basis of any relevant approach:

- active, hands-on learning
- conceptual learning that leads to understanding along with acquisition of basic skills
- meaningful, relevant learning experiences

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Message From The Executive Director: Speaking Up About Early Childhood Programs

Learning is a gift for life. Research has proven that young learners adapt aggressively to concepts and content, and respond to the nurturing of a skilled teacher. There is no limit to what the young mind can absorb. As proof of this, we need only to look to language mastery and physical development.

Educators accept the potential of developing young learners. We have been successful in promoting some programs to capitalize on the curiosity and energy of children. But much remains to be done.

Many initiatives concentrate on skills to support early language and literacy, nurturing social and emotional attributes, providing support for children with special needs and enabling differentiated instruction. As well, early childhood programs are often a source of parent education resources.

Across Canada there are many school districts that have placed emphasis on early childhood development. Very few have allocated additional financial resources to capitalize on this area of learning.

If we truly believe as educators that large strides in learning can be made through development of early childhood models, we must make this a priority and speak loudly to the concept.

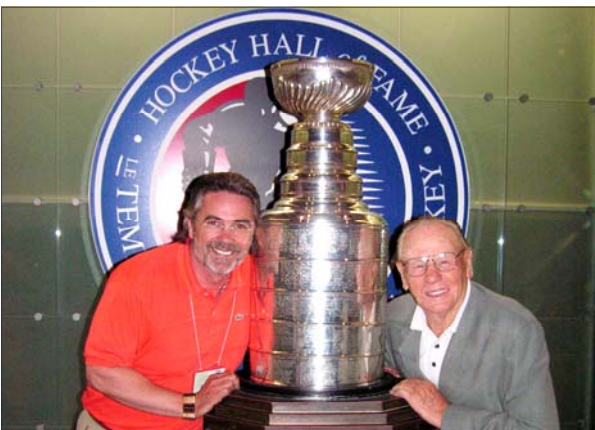


Frank Kelly
CASA executive director

Recognizing Diversity: A Report On The 2006 Summer Leadership Academy

By Ed Wittchen
CASA PD Director

Our 2006 Summer Leadership Academy opened on Thursday, July 13, in the magical setting of the Great Hall in Toronto's Hockey Hall of Fame. Under the domed stained glass ceiling and surrounded by the NHL's most coveted trophies and plaques, the hockey fans among us felt the game's true spirit.



Author **David Bouchard** and NHL legend **Johnny Bower** pose with Lord Stanley's Cup.


Following the OPSOA-sponsored opening reception, delegates were treated to a unique presentation. I had the pleasure of facilitating a conversation between award-winning author **David Bouchard** and Hockey Hall of Fame member **Johnny Bower**.

David has written 27 books and speaks to thousands of students, teachers and parents every year. Johnny took us down memory lane with his hockey stories and even did a rendition of his 1967 hit song "Honky the Christmas Goose." Johnny posed for photos and signed everything the guests had available. Afterwards, delegates were afforded an extra two hours to explore the exhibits at the Hall.

David Bouchard delivered our keynote address on Friday morning. That was followed by a roundtable session with 10 tables representing school divisions across Canada where participants could discuss special education issues.

According to our feedback, participants found this to be a helpful and informative session. The only problem? Some felt 40 minutes was not enough time.

(Continued on page 3)



**Reading is the
single most
important gift we
can hope to give to
our children.**

—David Bouchard

Summer Leadership Academy in Toronto, continued

(Continued from page 2)

Session after session afterwards continued to build upon the special education theme. The first was a look at how to work through the special education maze in the public school system. **Janet Olsen**, who in addition to being the communications manager for Northern Lights School Division in Alberta has children in the division, brought forth the challenges parents face. **Barb Gammon**, associate superintendent with the Palliser Regional Schools in Lethbridge, examined how school systems could and should communicate with parents of special needs children.



(Above) **Barb Gammon** (right) from Palliser and **Janet Olsen** from Northern Lights presented their thoughts on how school systems should communicate with parents of special needs children.

(Below) **Coralie Bryant** and **Ted Fransen** on hand to represent MASS, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents.



examined how school systems could and should communicate with parents of special needs children.

Metro Huculak and **Anita Griffore** of Yellowknife School Division demonstrated how they meet their students' needs in their northern territory.

Friday also included an overview of the Summer Leadership Academy taking place in Whitehorse next summer. Watch for details in upcoming issues of *Leaders & Learners*—a northern conference is sure to be a memorable experience.

The day ended with delegates attending either a theatre performance or a Blue Jays game. Those of us at the ballgame had a wonderful evening, as it was hot and the Rogers Centre roof was open.

We continued with the conference's theme on diversity throughout Saturday's sessions, starting with **Brian O'Leary** and **Edie Wilde** from Seven Oaks School Division

discussing their division's inclusive community approach. **Ken Thurston** then presented a discussion paper about support for public education, CASA's number one priority. The roundtable discussions that followed will help him formulate the final draft, which will be presented at the our Annual Conference later this year.

Next we held a series of informative breakout sessions featuring special education success stories from across the country. **Andrew Bennet** and **Dianna Carr** from Lester B. Pearson School Board in Quebec spoke about their Centre for Excellence in Autism, **Lee Kubica** shared with us details about the Yukon program offering services for students with fetal alcohol syndrome disorders and **Sandra McCaig** talked about inclusive practices at the secondary level in Winnipeg.

In the afternoon, **Michelle Forge** and **John Fauteux** from the Council of Ontario Directors of Education shared their experiences with a large-scale change. **Sandra Montgomery** from Toronto Catholic followed up on Janet Olsen and Barb Gammon's earlier session when she talked about communications for special needs students and their parents.

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Jenn Houtby, director for the Yukon Convention Bureau, highlighted some of the activities planned for Whitehorse in 2007.



There is a garden in every childhood, an enchanted place where colors are brighter, the air softer and the morning more fragrant than ever.
—Elizabeth Lawrence

Summer Leadership Academy in Toronto, continued

(Continued from page 3)

Sunday opened with a panel called “Advocates or Adversaries.” This session featured four organizations—the Association for Bright Children of Ontario, the Autism Society of Ontario, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and VOICE for Hearing Disabled—invited by CASA to demonstrate why it is better for educators to see them as advocates. They each offered solid evidence as to why educators should consider calling on them for their expertise.

In a follow-up to Michelle Forge’s session, **Joan Fullerton** and **Kathy Schaffer** from the Ontario Ministry of Education led a session on improving special needs students’ achievements.

The conference ended with **Walter** and **Marilyn Hrycauk** and **John Orr** from Northern Lights School Division talking about their six-year action research project. They showed that by using a focused literacy-intense approach, divisions can reduce their special education numbers significantly.

Thank you to all who participated in this year’s Summer Leadership Academy. We hope to see you and members of your division and provincial affiliate teams in Winnipeg this October for the CASA Annual Conference, and in Whitehorse next summer for another Summer Leadership Academy.

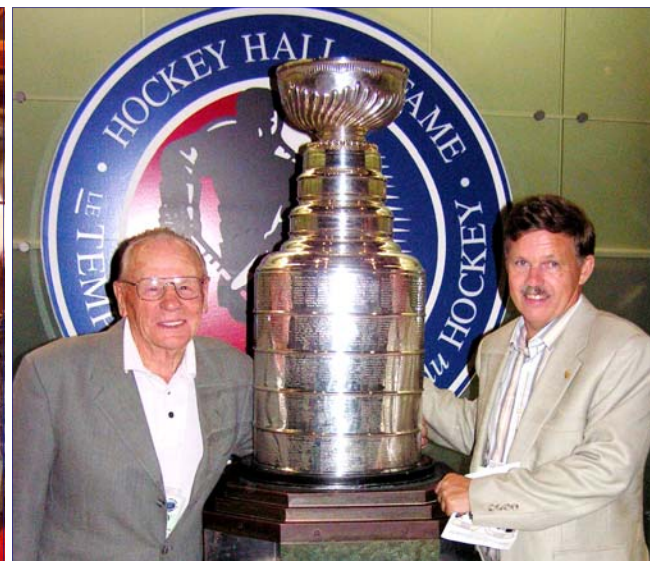

(Below, left) **Chris Gonnet** (left), **Lee Lucente** and **Sandra McCaig** sit in on a session.

(Below, right) **Johnny Bower** and **Jim Gibbons** with the Stanley Cup in the Hockey Hall of Fame, during the opening reception on Friday night.



(Above, top) **Carol Gray** and **Ken Thurston** during a refreshments break.

(Above, bottom) **Barry Stangeland** and **Maria De-Wolfe** listen intently to one of the presentations.

Never help a child
with a task at which
he feels he can
succeed.
—Maria Montessori

All photos by Ed Wittchen

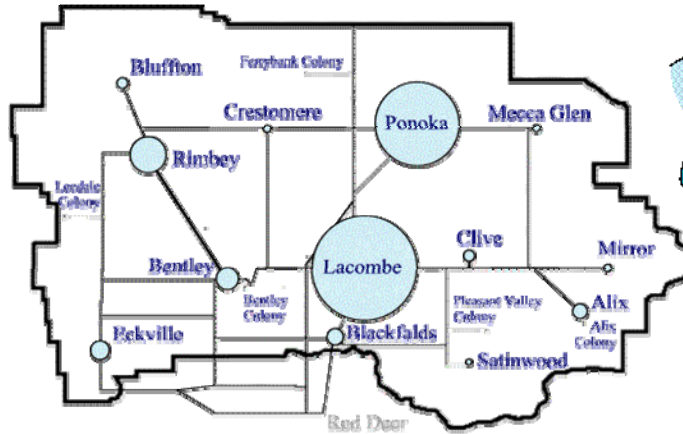
Early Childhood Education Literacy And Numeracy Issues: Focus On Wolf Creek School Division

Wolf Creek School Division No. 72 is located on both sides of Highway 2 in Alberta, midway between Calgary and Edmonton. Its 5,944-square-kilometre territory includes the towns of Lacombe, Ponoka, Blackfalds and Rimbey. Its closest urban centre is the city of Red Deer.

Wolf Creek has 31 schools that serve approximately 7,000 students (including home education and kindergarten). Half of the 40,000 people who live within the division's boundaries reside in the country, the rest in towns and villages. Most people work in agriculture and related service industries, with a considerable number also employed in the oil patch, construction, retail trade and service occupations.

Wolf Creek public schools reflect many of the major trends in Alberta. The unprecedented growth of the Highway 2 corridor due to the economic boom has seen a significant increase in the areas closest to Red Deer. On the other hand, the demographic decline of rural Canada is reflected in the division's more rural schools.

In recent years, Wolf Creek has accessed funding from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISII). The funds were used to offer early intervention for pre-kindergarten students with mild to moderate learning



kindergarten program.

Ponoka Elementary staff, he says, had noticed an increasing demand for resource room services. With early and targeted

disabilities in speech and language acquisition.

“The Cycle One AISI funding was utilized in Wolf Creek public schools to address two major areas: literacy and mathematics education,” explains Wolf Creek deputy superintendent Del Litke. “Each school was invited to submit a proposal for an AISI project based on these themes.”

Ponoka Elementary School submitted a project called the Ponoka Elementary Language Acquisition Class, or PELAC, to enhance literacy of target students.

“Essentially the PELAC program was designed as an early intervention program,” Litke says.

By using referrals from the local health unit and play-school, they were able to offer children with learning disabilities two years of programming emphasizing speech and language acquisition, instead of the regular

intervention, they felt they could bring down demand.

“Speech and language issues had been addressed by the school in the early grades,” he says. “PELAC attempted to address these issues prior to these students commencing their formal education.”

AISI funds helped supplement the project's expenditures; Ponoka Elementary also subsidized it significantly.

The PELAC program used both formal and informal assessments to determine the progress of each child. A report card was sent home twice a year to show parents what curriculum goals have been reached. Most of the children who attended the language program showed growth over time in all areas. Work samples were collected into portfolios as a means to assess progress in an informal manner.

The program was a definite success. Not only did the majority of children show advancement in terms of grade level equivalent, but there was remarkable improvement in all areas of development in every child. As well, parents were surveyed. In the first year, parents reported 100 per cent satisfaction with the PELAC program; in year two, it was still above 90 per cent. Informal feedback also shows that other participants in



Childhood is a short season.
—Helen Hayes

Early Childhood Education Literacy And Numeracy Issues: Focus On Wolf Creek School Division, continued

(Continued from page 5)

the program, such as the teacher, teacher assistants and staff from other agencies, were fully satisfied with the children's progress.

The success of the program can be attributed to a number of factors:

- the twice-weekly participation of a private speech and language pathologist
- the direct intervention each child received each day from a teacher assistant
- voluntary monthly meetings that involved the teacher, teacher assistant(s), speech and language pathologist, and parent(s)
- parent volunteers in the classroom
- the many materials (PELAC curriculum, parent handbook, pamphlets, portfolio, report card) developed over two years
- the parent and children information day at the beginning of each year
- speech/language home program packages, which were started in the second year
- newsletters for parents with suggestions on how they could

- incorporate program goals at home and information about program happenings
- involvement in multi-age grouping, such as using older children as language role models and having a higher adult ratio classroom
- small class size

There were also a number of challenges faced by the proponents of the program:

- greater than anticipated number of high needs children
- finding time to organize individual plans and program plans for two programs (PELAC and kindergarten)
- changes in teacher assistants over the three years; only the classroom teacher remained the same
- personality conflicts between teacher assistants and parents
- PELAC operating costs were more expensive than initially budgeted for; many purchases had to be made for three- and four-year-olds as the material already on hand, such as books and games, were geared for kindergarten-level children
- the lack of a private speech and language pathologist

Unfortunately, Litke says, despite the successes witnessed at many levels, the staffing element of PELAC will not continue. AISI funding ended upon completion of Cycle One of the project.

"The school was still prepared to supplement the program based on the successes," he says. "However, the rules of AISI dictated that projects could not be repeated."

The lessons learned from this experiment, though, will continue.

"We have incorporated our learnings—the PELAC teacher still works within the kindergarten program—from PELAC into our kindergarten program, particularly with the PUF (Program Unit Funding) students."

Wolf Creek School Division

- 21 regular schools
- 3 outreach schools
- 5 Hutterite Colony schools
- 1 hospital school
- 1 home education program
- 1 therapeutic school for students with psychiatric and/or behavioural problems
- French Immersion program in four Lacombe schools
- Native Education program in four Ponoka schools
- Approximately 475 teachers and 350 support staff service over 8,100 students
- 6 trustees on the Board
- 3,000 host intranet computer network serving students and staff
- 2005-2006 budget of approximately \$62 million
- 109 regular bus routes transport approximately 4,800 students to and from school on a daily basis



CONTACT CASA:

1123 Glenashton Drive
Oakville, ON
L6H 5M1
Canada

T: (905) 845-2345

F: (905) 845-2044

frank_kelly@opsoa.org

gillian@opsoa.org

www.casa-acas.ca

Editor: Tara Lee Wittchen

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Our Mission:

CASA will advance quality public education and excellence in system level leadership through advocacy and national collaboration.



Our Beliefs:

CASA believes that:

- Cultural diversity is a unique strength that enriches our nation.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and other partners is integral to successful student learning.
- Quality public education provides the best opportunity for a nation to enhance the lives of all its citizens.
- Effective system, provincial and national level leadership enables and supports excellence in teaching and learning.
- A comprehensive education, equitable and accessible to all, is the key to meeting the diverse needs and securing a successful future for our youth.

Specific strategies to advance the mission:

- Establish position papers on specific topics as they relate to the beliefs and interests of the association.
- Recruit new people.
- Establish a national representation.
- Establish a three-tier public relations and publications strategy.
- Establish a funding team to create an operating budget.

Message From The President: Thoughts On ECE

(Continued from page 1)

- interactive teaching and cooperative learning
- a broad range of relevant content, integrated across traditional subject matter divisions

Common to many jurisdictions, however, are the financing restrictions that inevitably affect the qualifications and training of the educators involved. These restrictions may consequently have an impact on the delivery of consistent, quality learning opportunities.



As administrators, we must not lose sight of the need to work cooperatively with community organizations and to lobby our respective governments to provide the financing to engage and retain qualified, well-remunerated teachers.

Our main challenges in Canadian ECE remain the building and acceptance of a common national purpose



and vision that will serve parents, provide children with quality learning and developmental opportunities, and give additional support to communities in need.

In our country, we have developed an educational system of exceptional quality. The inclusion of Early Childhood Education as an integral part of that system must be seen as a priority.