



# The Literacy Connection

The Macaulay Child Development Centre Early Literacy Newsletter ~ Issue 9, Summer 2009

## Involving Parents and Caregivers in School Readiness

### Planning with Children Makes a Difference

Mei Yan remembers her son's first day of kindergarten in Toronto. "I spent so much time showing Jian how to write English letters. But later I learned there are other skills he needs for school, like how to join a game. The Canadian school system is different from the school system at home, so it was difficult to know how to prepare him."

Mei is not alone. Thousands of Toronto families share this experience. Fortunately, Mei's daughter's transition to school was much easier because Mei discovered parent-child planning.

**"We played pretend school so she would not be so shocked in kindergarten." - Mei Yan, Toronto Parent**

"When Shu started kindergarten, we organized her backpack and we played pretend school so she would not be so shocked in kindergarten."

Combining play, warmth and reassurance, and planning for school with her daughter, Mei has hit upon an important strategy. A June 2009 study published in the journal *Child Development* shows that parent-child planning for school is linked to improved school performance.

(Perez and Gauvain, 2009)

The study also points out that children who have difficulties with their emotional development often struggle with planning for school with their parents. This is where staff referrals for support services can help families who are having trouble managing their child's behaviour.

**"It's important to share planning techniques with parents so they can help their child predict what will happen at school." - Fatima Rashid, Program Facilitator**

Fatima Rashid, Program Facilitator at the Flemingdon Park Schoolage and Family Centre, shares her approach to parent-child planning. She suggests families think through the first day of school from a child's perspective. Being "ready to learn" isn't only about academic skills.

Please see *School Readiness*  
continued on page 2.

### Concerned About a Child's Development?

Click on the City of Toronto's Red Flags Guide for tips on "How to Talk to Parents about Sensitive Issues", and to see a list of identification and support services for families:

<http://www.toronto.ca/health/earlychilddevelopment/pdf/redflagsguide.pdf>

## School Readiness (continued from page 1)

Fatima finds that “children whose parents have calmly, confidently walked their child through the steps of what to expect, do better than the children who are suddenly dropped off without warning. It helps families when we encourage parents to reassure their children, play, talk, listen and plan with them.”

**“Parents sometimes need reassurance that allowing children to have the time and space to explore and socialize with other children is very important.”**

- Nasrin Afshari, Parent/Child Educator

## How Play Helps with School Readiness

Nasrin Afshari, Parent/Child Educator for Hincks-Dellcrest helps families prepare their children for school. She encourages families to set aside time for children to play. Play is an essential part of healthy child development where children can learn to solve problems and gain self-confidence. These skills can make the transition to school go more smoothly.

**“It can be challenging because some families come from circumstances or places where play has had no recognition or importance at all.”**

- Fatima Rashid, Program Facilitator

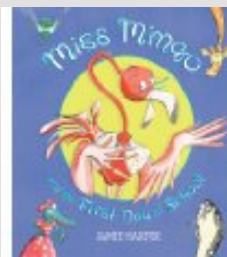
Back at Flemington Park, Fatima reflects on how to communicate about the importance of play: “We try to provide parents with information about what play can do for their children – both cognitively and emotionally. Children are advancing their skills through play, which eventually leads to skills that support those more traditional areas of academic success.”

## Parent-Child Planning Tips for School Readiness

### What can School Readiness Program Leaders recommend to families?

- ◆ Parents can play “getting ready for school” games with their children. Allow the child to lead the game, solve pretend problems, switch roles, etc. Children and parents can take turns playing different roles such as “teacher”, “student” or “friend”.
- ◆ Families can provide paper and markers or crayons so children can feel comfortable scribbling and drawing their own ideas. Writing play should be child-led and can include making pictures, drawing signs, and scribbling lists, depending on the child’s stage of development.
- ◆ Many children find it reassuring to help brainstorm and *see* a simple, short picture list of things to remember to do before leaving, such as “brush teeth” or “eat breakfast.”
- ◆ Rehearse getting ready and walking to the school. Keep it fun!
- ◆ Parents and children can plan what should go in a child’s school backpack. Families can “play school” by using the items for various school situations (e.g., changing wet socks).

### What's New In Children's Books?



Newly released **Miss Mingo and the First Day of School** (2009) by Jamie Harper follows Miss Mingo (a flamingo) as she celebrates the uniqueness of each of her animal students. Interesting

animal facts appear on each page, but are set apart from the story, making this book a solid choice for school readiness programs.

ISBN - 10: 0763641340

## Circle Time - With a "Twist"!

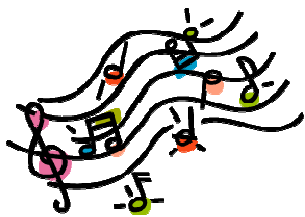
### *Building School Readiness while Developing Community*

Tina Osahan, Program Worker at the Eglinton-Lawrence Early Years Centre finds that shared singing helps children develop school readiness skills and also builds a sense of community.

**"Singing is one of those experiences that brings everyone together. People from many different backgrounds come together to share the experience."**

- Tina Osahan, Program Worker

Dr. Marni Binder, Assistant Professor at Ryerson's School of ECE, explains that "circle time offers the opportunity for children to have voice and express personal stories in meaningful ways. It provides inclusive opportunities for all children to engage in purposeful talk and be part of a learning community."



Dr. Rachel Langford, Director of the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University agrees:

"Other than snacks and meals, circle time is the prime opportunity during the day where families can participate in a joint activity in which everyone contributes. A joyful, exciting atmosphere helps children as they learn to see themselves as both individuals and as part of a community. Parents and children jointly focus on activities that can become part of family life."

## Encouraging Parent-Child Joint Attention

Some families may be new to the experience of circle time, or may not seem interested in participating. Education workers play a key role in helping parents and caregivers understand *why* their participation in circle time *with their child* benefits their child. Osahan notes that children take their cues from their parents. "We encourage parents to be active with their child in the circle, moving, clapping, singing along and connecting with their child."



## Dancing in Circle

Introducing new, interesting circle activities in a multi-age group with a variety of adult and child abilities can be a challenge. Dr. Langford recommends designing circle activities with music and movement, including singing and dance: "Simple dances are a natural partner activity where parents can easily join in with their child."

Researchers have discovered many benefits of adding dance to early learning programs:

- ◆ Different rhythms, beats and speeds help develop mathematical and logical skills.
- ◆ Dance allows children to experience emotional feelings and cues.
- ◆ Movement through dance helps children develop personal identity, and become more aware of their bodies.
- ◆ Providing a variety of arts experiences can help expand programs for children with different movement abilities and interests.
- ◆ Using group physical movement with pretend imagery (such as animals, emotions, weather, etc.) "can help with attention, speed, retention, and enjoyment of learning."

*Sacha & Ross (2006); Lorenzo-Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007).*

*See tips for using inclusive dance in circle on page 4!*

## Songs to Sing with Families

Feature songs this issue in Tamil and Spanish

### Anile Vaa Vaa

(Tamil Transliteration)

Anile Anile vaa vaa,  
Azhagiya Anile vaa vaa,  
Goiyya maram yeri vaa vaa,  
Gundu pazham kondu vaa vaa.

### Chipmunk, Chipmunk, Come, Come,

(English translation of Anile Vaa Vaa)

Chipmunk chipmunk come, come.  
Beautiful chipmunk come, come.  
Climb high up a guava tree ,  
Bring a ripe fruit back to me.

Listen to a recording of *Anile Vaa Vaa* at [www.mamalisa.com](http://www.mamalisa.com) .  
Click on *Asia*, then click on *Sri Lanka*, then scroll down to *Tamil*.

### Un Ratoncito Sale de la Cueva: Canción de Corro (Spanish)

Un ratoncito sale de la cueva  
Mueve el hocico y juega a la rueda.  
Dos ratoncitos salen de la cueva  
Mueven el hocico y juegan a la rueda.  
Tres ratoncitos salen de la cueva  
Mueven el hocico y juegan a la rueda...

### A Little Mouse Goes Out of the Cave Circle Game Song (English Translation)

A little mouse is going out of the cave,  
It's moving its nose and playing a circle game.  
Two little mice are going out of the cave,  
They're moving their noses and playing a circle game.  
Three little mice are going out of the cave... (etc.)

Listen to a recording of *Un Ratoncito Sale de la Cueva* at [www.mamalisa.com](http://www.mamalisa.com) . Click on "Europe", then on "Spain".  
This song currently appears first in the list.

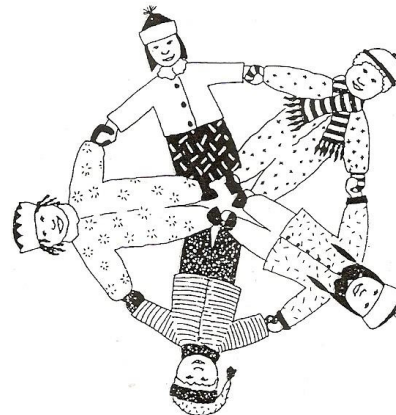
### Toronto's Early Literacy Team

Stacy Markowski—West Quadrant x 338  
Cathy Webb—East Quadrant x 329  
Dave Page—South Quadrant x 328  
Ruth Gayle—North Quadrant x 327  
Susan Gowans—Program Manager

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## Using Dance for All Abilities In Circle Times

For more information about Circle and Dance, please see page 3.



- ◆ Feeling hesitant to try dance during circle?  
You can start with a simple children's song that you know well and feel comfortable singing.
- ◆ Choose a song with different characters (such as animals) that easily lend themselves to pretend play.
- ◆ Use a tambourine, hand-held drum, or make your own percussion instrument to create a strong beat, and introduce simple arm or leg movements.
- ◆ Include children, families and caregivers with disabilities by offering movement choices. This allows participants with a variety of physical abilities to choose movements that suit individual needs. (For example, give a choice to "clap", "foot-stomp" or "head-nod".)
- ◆ Circle leaders can also tell a story as the basis of a dance. Children create movements that show what the characters do in the story.

### Hold the Date!

The next Literacy Leaders event will  
be on Friday, October 9th at the  
Macaulay Child Development Centre  
from 1:30 to 4:00 pm.