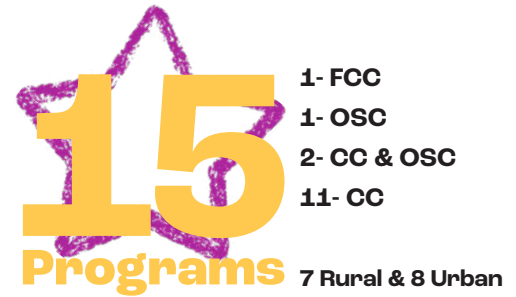


Participant Context

Currently, 15 programs are participating in a pilot project that reflects the diversity of early learning programs across the province. These programs include a range of rural and urban sites, as well as various types of programs, such as Child Care (CC), Family Child Care (FCC), and Out of School Care (OSC). The geographical context of the project spans the following communities: Clairmont, Bonnyville, Wabasca, Whitecourt, Edmonton (3 locations), Consort, Red Deer, Calgary (2 locations), Cochrane (2 locations), and Lethbridge (2 locations).



Carole Massing

Leadership Team

ARCQE's Cultural Leadership Team is comprised of two "Project Leads" that align the theoretical context of the Spark Guide to culturally responsive practice approaches for early learning programs.



Mary Lynne Matheson

Carole Massing and Mary Lynne Matheson have a lengthy history of knowledge and involvement in supporting culturally responsive practice as co-authors of the book Introduction to Early Education & Care: An Intercultural Perspective, work with the Intercultural Child & Family Centre, along with Mary-Lynne's experience supporting ARCQE's Pedagogical Leadership service model and Carole's involvement on the Spark Guide's Advisory Committee and Advisory Committee members of ARCQE's Creating Cultural Connections project.

Cultural Partner Team

The Spark Mentorship Program is supported by 8 members of ARCQE's existing Pedagogical Partner team and 2 members of Creating Cultural Connections Mentor team. The Cultural Partners supporting this work bring context of rich relationship-based practice knowledge and well-established connection with programs in the sector. All of ARCQE's Cultural Partners have extensive leadership training of best practice in early learning relative to child development, the Flight Framework, regulatory requirements and cultural diversity.

Site Support Focus

Cultural Partners provide support, primarily by being on-site and collaborating with the program leader as well as with the rest of the educator team in the program.

Site support focus has the intended outcomes that educators will have:

- Increased access to culturally diverse resources and materials that support emotional, spiritual, cultural and physical needs of all children
- Increased confidence and competence in supporting cultural diversity in their program



Community Connection Sessions

All programs involved in the Spark Mentorship Program also participate in community level engagement sessions as part of a professional learning community. These sessions are facilitated monthly and focus on reflective practice dialogue, small group conversations, sharing individual program context relative to culturally responsive practice interests and program needs.

Attendees: These sessions are attended by program educators, Cultural Partners, and Cultural Leadership Team members.



Training + Development

In preparation of supporting the Spark Mentorship Program, all Cultural Partners participated in a two-day orientation (14 hours) of specialized content developed in alignment with the Spark Guide and culturally responsive practice.

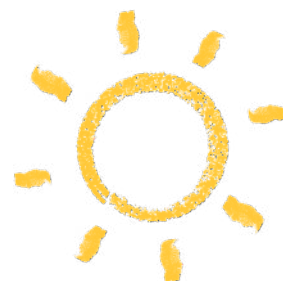
The focus of the training included:

1. Introduction to the Spark guide & project

2. Culturally responsive practices, using:

- The Cultural Responsiveness Inventory
- Reflecting through the lens of diversity
- Talking threads on cultural humility, racism and discrimination, exploring white privilege, the impact of colonialism, newcomers to Canada, supporting home language, navigating gender, supporting children's spirituality, and working with diverse educators.

3. Resources: these topics were supported with articles, videos, and exercises that include self-reflection, program characteristics, cultural assessments, welcoming families, considering celebrations, skilled dialogue and wise practice.



Ongoing Mentor Support

Cultural Team Leads & individual Partners meet every other month to review emerging issues/trends arising in programs to support timely and culturally responsive practice strategies as they arise. In alternate months, the Cultural Team Leads and Cultural Partners come together to review broader emerging practice challenges that are relevant to all programs.



Learning + Insights

- Relationships form the basis for trust
- Long-term, established relationships between programs and ARCQE enhance the foundation for scaffolding new learning.
- Program context evolves as children, family & educators grow and change.
- A deeper understanding of cultural context adds richness and meaning to practice.
- Intentionality in exploring cultural approaches both affirms and also identifies unknown gaps.
- Varied support approaches (PLC's, site support, small group discussions, resources) are important given varied experience and comfort.
- Knowledge of other Spark initiatives and resources are important to ensure continuity and philosophical alignment.



Promotion + Awareness

- On November 22nd, and 23rd, ARCQE hosted its annual Child Day Conference which supported attendance of 597 attendees (in person & via online) all receiving information about the new Spark Mentorship Program featured as part of the ARCQE-ives booklet included in all delegate bags.
- Members from PolicyWise for Children and Families were engaged as part of the conference vendor 'mARCQEtplace' of partners sharing communication and information about the new Spark Guide and Spark Resource Hub to all delegates in attendance.
- November 23rd, ARCQE launched its newly branded and developed website featuring a section on 'Our Partners' and these new initiatives. The Spark Mentorship Program is highlighted on our new site. While the initiative is not currently accepting new program applications, an expression of interest form will be available to support future potential engagement.



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