

DOING EARLY LEARNING

SSHRC project summary 2004

Canadian children, as a group, are arguably among the most privileged in the world. However, the lack of coordination of early childhood education and care in Canada has been criticised by educators and policy researchers (e.g., Chance, 2000; Friendly, 2000). In response to such criticisms, the federal government introduced its *National Children's Agenda* in 1999 and an *Early Childhood Development (ECD) Agreement* the following year (Government of Canada, 2003). Under the auspices of the ECD there has been a proliferation of early learning programmes for young children and their caregivers.

The proposed study will empirically investigate social interaction among leaders, children, and adult participants in such early learning programmes for very young children and their adult caregivers. We focus on three broad categories of work: support for early childhood literacy, the care and parenting of young children, and the information seeking, giving and exchange that goes on among programme participants. The purposes of the study are (1) to identify work carried out by all members of each setting, not only programme leaders but also child and adult participants, and (2) to investigate the social organization, including the discursive organization, of that work.

The study builds on and will contribute to research literature in two fields: library and information science (LIS) and early childhood education and care (ECEC). In library and information science, the study will contribute to the developing literature of *information seeking in context*, a framework that promotes the study of information seeking as it occurs within specific everyday-life (Savolainen 1995) or workplace contexts. By focusing concretely on the actual work carried out and by defining *work* generously, it will bring into view work that is often omitted from workplace activity reports. The study will also contribute to the research literature of early childhood education and care. It provides much needed empirical information about what actually goes on in early learning programmes and will explicate ways in which work carried out in such programmes is linked to work carried out elsewhere, in particular the work of institutions. The study complements large-scale longitudinal studies that track indicators of children's well-being and evaluative studies that map community assets or assess programme effectiveness. The findings will be of interest to librarians, early childhood educators, and policy makers concerned with the well-being of young children and their families, and will provide starting points for systematic investigations for specific aspects of the programmes.

Chance, G. W. (2000). Parenting, pressures and policies. *Education Canada*, 39 (4), 4-8..

Friendly, M. (2000). Child care as a social policy issue. In L. Prochner & N. Howe (Eds.), *Early childhood care and education in Canada* (pp. 252-272). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Government of Canada (2003). *Backgrounder: Federal/Provincial/Territorial children's initiatives helping to give Canadian children the best possible start in life*. Ottawa, ON: Human Resources Development Canada and Health Canada.

http://socialunion.gc.ca/ecd/ecd-back051203_e.html (Visited 1st July, 2004):

Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: approaching information seeking in the context of "way of life". *Library & Information Science Research*, 17, 259-194.