

## Mentoring Pairs for Child Care: Supporting Child Care Supervisors

By Tammy McCormick & Glory Ressler

Note: In Ontario, the "Supervisor" is the administrator/executive director of a child care facility.

Considerable research has documented the relationship between the quality of the leadership and administrative practices of the director and the centre's quality. A report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources<sup>1</sup> in Ontario recognized that the gap between education requirements and job expectations is particularly great for directors and supervisors of child care programs because they receive minimal, if any, training that prepares them for the growing demands and responsibilities of these positions.

Recognizing that mentoring is an effective means to bridge educational requirements and job expectations for directors and supervisors and to raise the level of quality in child care programs service delivery, the Government of Ontario funded the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) located in St. Catharines, Ontario, to develop, administer and evaluate a province-wide mentoring program and related resources and services for licensed child care supervisors.

"Mentoring Pairs for Child Care" (MPCC) is designed to support enhanced child care quality by matching less experienced child care supervisors (mentees) with more experienced child care supervisors (mentors) in their own communities. These mentoring pairs complete a yearlong training program that incorporates group learning, one-on-one conferencing, networking, and guided communication to develop their

### MPCC Partners:

Child Care Human Resources Sector Council  
Community Quality Initiatives Consolidated Municipal Systems Manager and District Social Services Administration Board representatives and Band Councils  
Early Learning and Care Committees  
Government of Ontario Mentoring Animators (34)  
Partners in Practice  
Past and Current Advisory Committee Members  
Post Secondary Partners (25)  
Supervisor Networks

management skills. The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council's *Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators*<sup>2</sup> provides the framework for the program, allowing both mentors and mentees to support and expand their understanding of the requirements for excellence in their careers as child care supervisors. In two years, some 540 supervisors and assistant supervisors across Ontario have graduated and received

MPCC program post-diploma program credits from one of 25 Ontario post-secondary partners on the project. Groups spanned the province and included urban, rural, Francophone and First Nations specific programs.

The ECCDC remotely administered and supported the implementation of the MPCC local programs through its secure web-based application. This included the features of matching, information sharing and evaluation available to partners and participants on the MPCC website. The online site is being used to develop a province wide e-platform for mentoring and the existing features will allow ECCDC to remotely administer future MPCC programs in any location.

### MPCC Processes and Tools

#### Web-based application, selection and matching

Considerable attention was given to the web-based application, selection and matching of "mentors" and "mentees". Mentors have the required knowledge, skills, and abilities to competently perform the tasks of a child care supervisor as outlined in the Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators; have a desire to support the growth and development of less experienced supervisors; and are committed to the mentoring process. Mentors are paired with "mentees"- supervisors working in licensed child care programs who want to use the mentoring process to improve and/or acquire the experience, skills, knowledge and abilities required for competence in their supervisory practice. The electronic process simplifies the matching procedure and was designed to predict mentoring pair<sup>3</sup> compatibility on the variables of: level of experience, skill and knowledge, geography and teaching and learning style preference compatibility.

#### Skill development training

Animators hired by MPCC post-secondary partners facilitate *skill development training* for mentoring pairs in their local groups. Both mentors and mentees receive training to develop an understanding of the mentoring process, reflective practice, effective communication, and ethical practice. To successfully support the growth and development of the mentee, mentors receive additional training on facilitating reflective thinking, adult development, and mentoring techniques.

#### Monthly group meetings

Over a twelve month period, mentors and mentees participate in *monthly group meetings* facilitated by their Animators. These group meetings are important to the growth and development of both mentors and mentees, providing an opportunity for the entire group of mentoring pairs to learn from each other on a regular basis and increase their awareness of the child care field as a whole. They are designed to facilitate reflective practice and sustain continuous learning by encouraging mentors and mentees to decide on what is needed to enrich the quality of their child care practice.

During the meetings mentoring pairs focus on the tasks and sub-tasks of the Occupational Standards for Administrators specific to their group's interests. Mentoring pairs tap into and share their individual wisdom of quality child care practice and their work as a child care supervisor. They use self-assessment and planning tools to reflect on their performance to identify needs and together review, reconsider, analyze and integrate new insights and understanding into their practice and to create plans to engage in continuous growth and learning activities.

Animators facilitate the growth of a mentoring culture whereby members of the mentoring group are encouraged to recognize, trust, value and respect each other's skills, knowledge and abilities. Members of the group engage in cooperative inquiry and dialogue that facilitates reflection and promotes the integration of perspectives with one's individual thoughts, values, beliefs, knowledge and skills, resulting in transformational learning. Safe dialogue and inquiry creates a sense of understanding of what each offers to the relationship and what each requires for their continuous growth and learning.

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### Site visits and Conferencing

Essential to the mentoring process is *mentoring pair site visits*, which provide the mentoring pair with opportunities to work together in their programs and observe each other implementing the tasks of a child care supervisor over the twelve months. This allows for sufficient opportunities to observe, model, and coach. Conferences held in a quiet, uninterrupted space allow for immediate feedback, reflection, evaluation, and goal setting. Mentoring pairs observe and reflect upon specific strategies and techniques used to help solve day to day problems and issues, and provide an opportunity for mentors to support the mentees' transfer from theory to practice. Additionally, the mentoring pair uses other communication methods to complement their face to face meetings, such as telephone and email. To facilitate site visits in isolated communities, alternative communication methods such as video conferencing are used by mentoring pairs.

### Journaling

To assist the mentoring relationship in developing and growing into one of trust and mutual respect, opportunities for safe, respectful dialogue and reflection between the mentor and mentee are crucial. In addition to site visits and conferencing, guided journaling based on the child Care Administrator Occupational Standards is incorporated into the skill development training and group meetings and used as a tool to focus and direct conferences and site visits. The reflection journals help mentoring pairs consider their experiences and identify the wisdom they have accumulated through practice, charting individual progress and reinforcing reflection-on-action.<sup>4</sup> Journals serve as a means to integrate one's existing knowledge with new concepts and ideas they have been exposed to through the mentoring process.

### Leadership development

Using selected articles, participants keep leadership journals where they reflect on individual leadership skills and practices and how to utilize their leadership strengths and weaknesses to support and develop their staff and child care community. Study groups are delivered in such a way as to encourage the development of a strong support network for mentoring pairs to become leaders and advocates in their communities. Participatory leadership is encouraged through group and community presentations as part of the program; through encouraging local information sharing, network and committee participation; and knowledge sharing and opportunities to provide feedback and reflection on provincial and national initiative.

### MPCC Resource Development

Throughout the project, in response to mentoring pairs and community partners expressed needs, MPCC developed and offered the following:

- Mentoring Toolkits used in a variety of contexts and applied to issues or opportunities;
- Provincial and community data briefs on information concerning supervisor training needs;
- Training on a mentoring approach to leadership and the skills required to build a mentoring learning culture among staff, groups, organizations, networks and committees;
- Checklists on the Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators (2005) and Early Childhood Educators (2010);
- The capacity to offer training in a variety of validated quality assessments tools, along with online data inputting and reporting and program support services; and
- Consultation services on strategies for implementing formal and informal mentoring.

### MPCC Framework: Partners in Practice mentoring model

While the content of the program focuses on using the Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators as the basis for self-assessment concerning strengths and needs, knowledge building and applying practical improvements to centre administration, the vehicle by which MPCC was delivered was built on the Partners In Practice (PIP) mentoring model. At the PIP mentoring model's core is the mentoring pair relationship meeting the mentor's and mentee's needs of belonging, voice, and safe dialogue and Some observations from "*Impact on Participants, Their Centres, Community Partners and the Early Learning and Child Care Community*" (Doherty, 2010)<sup>5</sup>

reflection. It encourages the development and growth of a mentoring culture where community and mentoring pairs support and recognize each other; are reflective practitioners; engage in continuous growth and learning; and honour the individuals in the relationship, respect what they bring to it, and recognize that everyone has knowledge and expertise. These outcomes reflect the model's guiding principles or how we view each other and ourselves in the mentoring relationship. *Guiding principles* are one of the ways the mentoring relationship is supported within the model along with *mentoring tools and strategies* (the materials and processes used to support and develop the mentoring relationship); and a *community-based development approach* (how the mentoring relationship is supported by the community).

### MPCC Evaluation process and results to-date

The evaluation framework, measures the effectiveness of MPCC's processes and its impact (outcome) on individuals, programs and communities. The process evaluation has been completed and the outcome evaluation is still in process.

The first year's *process evaluation* enabled MPCC to modify the administrative processes and materials used with the first group to refine and enhance the processes for the second group. As stated in "*Final Process Evaluation Report's Executive Summary*"<sup>6</sup> (Doherty, 2010):

"The overall approach to program delivery, with use of collegial learning, peer support, and content that has immediate application, has been a resounding success. Participants quickly become actively engaged in group meetings and other MPCC strategies, contribute their own materials such as case studies, and are using the knowledge and skills they are developing to address issues in their centres. Through working together participants have discovered how much they learn from each other and developed strong peer support networks."

"...Amendments made to the tools and strategies subsequent to Phase I were successful with those concerns that they addressed.... In conclusion, MPCC has a model, tools, processes, and an overall approach to program delivery that is ready for use with future cohorts."

The *impact evaluation* framework is based on Gursky's<sup>7</sup> model of four levels of possible outcomes for training human services providers. The MPCC evaluation measures achievement of Gursky's four outcome levels plus one additional outcome:

- Level 1: Adults learn best what they feel a need to learn and forget or do not use information that seems irrelevant to their needs. This level measures participants' reaction to the training experience, e.g. do they feel the time was well-spent?
- Level 2: Participant's learning is evidenced by self-reported changes in knowledge, skills and/or beliefs.
- Level 3: Demonstrable changes in behaviour, e.g. new on-the-job practices
- Level 4: Demonstrable enhancement of organization and/or service quality, e.g. quality of program practices.
- Additional outcome: Impact on the larger community, e.g. local ELCC network, community college.

In this framework, the first four outcomes (Gursky's four levels) are a hierarchy in which the first is a pre-requisite for the second and so on. Thus, success in the earlier levels is necessary, valid and relevant since it is a pre-requisite for the level 4 goal of enhancing centre quality. The additional outcome is not hierarchical because it can be achieved without accomplishing Gursky's level 4.

The *outcome evaluation*, still in progress, involves sixty-three pre-program observations, using the Program Administration Scale, Caregiver Interaction Scale and ECERS-R. These were conducted in ten Ontario communities by observers<sup>8</sup> trained to 80% inter-rater reliability standards. Post program observations are in progress<sup>9</sup> and the final outcome evaluation report will be completed in May 2011. While the outcome evaluation is still in process, evaluation of the impact on the first group of participants is promising.

4. *Reflection-on-action* is a process that allows mentors and mentees to be more aware of what they do, how they do it, why they do it, identify useful problem

indicate that:

“Responses from all sources indicated many positive impacts, most of which were statistically significant ... that is, they were highly unlikely to have occurred simply by chance.”

“Graduates perceive their MPCC participation as having improved their: (a) administrative knowledge and skills; (b) the extent to which they have the attitudes and predispositions that are associated with effective mentoring; and (c) their professional development in a range of job-related feelings, knowledge, and skills. These findings bode well for centre quality given research reports of a positive association between the extent to which supervisors believe they benefited from administrative training after becoming supervisors and improved scores on standard tools such as the ECERS-R.”

“MPCC community partners perceive MPCC Phase I as having had a positive impact on: (a) participants' centres; and (b) the functioning and infrastructure of the local Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) community.”

“Each of MPCC's four partners report positive benefits to their programs and/or work activities from Phase I.” (Doherty (2010))

Doherty's (2010) findings in “MPCC Phase I, Impact on Professional Development” show that:

- MPCC is successfully addressing its goals.
- Participants are revitalized and enthusiastic about working in the child care field after completing MPCC, have increased levels of professionalism and leadership skills and feel more confident in the supervisor role.
- Participants strongly agree that MPCC established strong mentoring relationships.

The *impact evaluation* results to-date indicate success at Gursky's levels 1, 2, and the additional outcome of having a positive impact on the larger community. The extent to which MPCC meets Gursky's levels 3 and 4 will be apparent when all the observations are completed. To date a number of outcomes have been reported by both the first and second groups including:

- Development and sharing of policies, practices and resources;
- Formation of sub-committees to address quality or small centre needs;
- Parent panel presentations to better address Family & Community Relations;
- Increased attendance at local non-MPCC training, professional development events and network/committee meetings;
- Increased delivery of presentations, updates and training, locally and provincially, by MPCC participants ;
- Successful proposals and required licensing related improvements;
- Increased partnerships, communication and community outreach;
- Changes in classroom environment;
- Increased use of assessment and screening tools;
- Increased use of technology, and
- Improved centre staff meetings, information sharing, development activities and communications.

For more information on MPCC or to obtain resources and services visit [mpcc.org](http://mpcc.org) or contact Glory Ressler at [gessler@eccdc.org](mailto:gessler@eccdc.org) or 905-646-7311 extension 319.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, (March 2007) *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practices, Programs and Parents*.
2. Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, (2007) *Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators*, Ottawa, ON:CCHRSC.
3. A *mentoring pair* includes a mentor and a mentee

solving strategies, and recognize and work with their own strengths and weaknesses.

5. Doherty, G. (2010), *Final Process Evaluation Report's Executive Summary*, St Catherines, ON: MPCC.
6. Gursky, T.R. (1998). “The age of our accountability”, *Journal of Staff Development*, 19(4), on-line journal retrieved November 25, 2009 from <http://www.nsdcc.org/news/gursky194.cfm>.
7. All observers had a minimum of 9 years post-graduate ECE experience
8. Since some pre program observed centres cannot be used for post observations because of factors such as supervisor no longer at the centre, there will be fewer pre-post observations to use in the outcome evaluation.
9. Doherty, G. (2010) *Impact on Participants, Their Centres, Community Partners and the Early Learning and Child Care Community*, St Catherines, ON: MPCC

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The **ECCDC**, located in St. Catharines, Ontario, is an independent, non-profit, charitable organization committed to helping early learning and care programs & providers to be at their best by offering specialized resources, training, and supports. Since its creation in 1992 by local volunteers, the ECCDC has become one of Canada's leading early learning and care resource, referral, and support organizations.

**Reflecting In Practice ~ La réflexion professionnelle** is the theme of the 2011 Child Care Conference and Trade show being held June 10 & 11 in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Special guest is Margie Carter, author and mentor. In addition to Margie's administrator PD day, keynote and workshop, there will be workshops focusing on reflective practice. Watch for the conference web site, in February 2011 and mark your calendars for another great conference convened by CCCNS, CCECENS, CPRPS and NSCCA!

#### CONNECTIONS RESOURCE LIBRARY

[www.cccns.org/library.html](http://www.cccns.org/library.html)

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**Child Care Human Resources Sector Council** (2006) *Occupational standards for child care administrators*. Ottawa: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, CCCNS No. F-010-CCHRSC.

**Cividanes, W. and Lebo, D.** (2010) Cultivating a reflective disposition for teaching and learning. *Exchange* 196: 48-50. CCCNS No. F-120-Civ/CCIE.

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1 Report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, (March 2007) *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practices, Programs and Parents*.

2 Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, (2007) *Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators*, Ottawa, ON: CCHRSC.

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7 Gursky, T.R. (1998). "The age of our accountability", *Journal of Staff Development*, 19(4), on-line journal retrieved November 25, 2009 from <http://www.nsd.c.org/news/gursky194.cfm>.

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