



Spark Mentorship Program (SMP) Pilot Cohort transitions to Spark Engagement Network (SEN)

It's unbelievable to note that the pilot cohort of the Spark Mentorship Program has already completed their one year! Great learning and sharing in their final Professional Learning Community with the new onboarding SMP cohort. Hands On Learning and Sunny South programs shared an amazing Land Acknowledgment that they worked on together with their families and children.

Another exciting moment for the project was highlighted as one Cultural Partner shared a draft of a book she has been compiling with another program detailing how the stories exchanged during one of her visits sparked the writing of a book about the educators' childhood.

As the Pilot cohort completes a full year in the Spark program, they will now move on to form the Spark Engagement Network. This is another PLC created to keep the Spark Mentorship Program alumni in contact and to continue supporting the sharing of stories of their culturally responsive practice and to inspire one another.

To learn more about culturally responsive early childcare strategies, and to encourage educators to read the Spark Guide, [click here to download the Guide in English or French versions.](#)



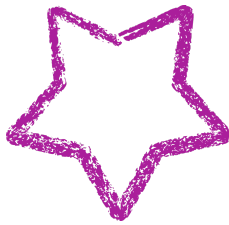
As a reminder about who the SMP is for and how the program is delivered, feel free to share the following information with other early childhood programs as well as among the Francophone early childhood communities.

Who do we serve?

Early Learning and childcare programs and agencies serving children aged birth to 12 years old.

Where do we deliver?

The SMP is delivered through a combination of on-site support and virtual engagement, exploring cultural conversation threads.



From Pilot to Project

SMP started its pilot phase with 15 early childhood programs across Alberta. Pilot programs have since transitioned to the provincial Spark Engagement Network at the end of September. In April, a new cohort of eight programs joined SMP, followed by an additional 15 programs onboarding in October! By the end of the project year- a total of 38 programs will have actively participated in supporting the implementation of Spark Guide strategies in early learning settings across Alberta.



From the Program Leader's Desk

Mary Lynne Matheson

This past August, the Program Lead had the opportunity to attend a workshop on Developing Children's Spirituality, facilitated by Kathy Barnhart. The session was organized in response to cultural partners' ongoing questions about this meaningful topic.

Reflecting on the experience, Mary Lynne, the Program Lead, shared, *"I have been thinking about how we might view playroom environments through the lens of wonder and awe."*

She recalled an influential article by Jim Greenman that explored the many dimensions of wonder and how they nurture children's curiosity and well-being. To enhance Flight's elements of responsive environments, time, space, materials, and participation, and to align with the SMP Cultural Responsiveness Inventory, Mary Lynne suggested that programs might also consider integrating Greenman's

(1993) ideas, such as the magic of cause and effect, the joy of invented spaces, the miracle of life, and the wonder of construction.

She added, “As a result, we are developing a Talking Thread on the essence of wonder and its connection to cultural responsiveness, along with a Learning Activity that will invite you to reflect on playroom environments through Jim Greenman’s elements of wonder and awe. Once these resources are ready, your Cultural Partner will share more details.”

References

Greenman, J. (1993). Just wondering: Building wonder into the environment. *Exchange* (1/93). pp. 32-36.

Massing, C. & Matheson, M.L. (2024). Supporting children’s spirituality. Spark Mentoring Program. Edmonton, AB.



Coordinators Corner

A Message from Amaka Amadike | SMP Program Coordinator

These past few months have reminded me of the incredible strength and greatness of humanity. Individuals who once doubted their ability to deliver the Spark Mentorship Program have dug deep, grown in confidence, and successfully transformed 18 programs by mentoring educators, an achievement that has positively impacted countless families. The Cultural Partners’ dedication, compassion, and willingness to learn have created ripple effects of change within the early learning spaces.

This experience reaffirms that transformation begins with one step at a time. As more early childhood programs and educators embrace this journey, Alberta’s early childhood landscape will continue to evolve in becoming more culturally responsive, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse families’ it serves. What a beautiful vision it is to see cultural responsiveness woven into early learning curricula. We can do this Alberta!

You can request participation for your program on the ARCQE website or contact Amaka Amadike at amendy7200@gmail.com to learn more about how your program can participate.



Professional Learning Communities

Monthly PLCs

This quarter, many program leads and educators actively participated in the Spark Mentorship Program's monthly PLC sessions. It was inspiring to see new programs join the community and to hear members of the pilot cohort share their success stories and learning experiences as part of the September session.



Meet a Cultural Partner!

Sabrina Nesbit



Hello! My name is Sabrina Nesbit. I am a Cultural

When I am not working (indoors), I love to be outside! I genuinely enjoy each of the seasons that Canada has to offer. Some of my favourite activities are camping, fishing, gardening, and going on adventures with my partner and two dogs. I am a huge advocate for outdoor play. In the past, I was part of a pilot project that introduced an outdoor classroom to a traditionally indoor only preschool program. It was a wonderful opportunity to share my passion and knowledge for outdoor play with other early

Partner for ARCQE's Spark Mentorship Program. It is an honour and a pleasure to introduce myself to you. I have been working in the Early Childhood Education field for a total of 18 years. I have extensive experience working with children, families, and other professionals in various early learning settings.

learning professionals, the children, and their families.

I am inspired everyday by the curiosity, wonderment, and excitement that the children bring to the programs. My favourite part of Spark is getting to create new relationships with the members of each community I work in. I am excited to be a part of this experience, and I look forward to seeing what the future brings for the program.



September Highlights

Sept 30, 2025

National Day of Truth and Reconciliation: This day honours the children who never made it back to their homes and survivors of residential schools in Canada.

Government of Canada Resources

- [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
- [Understanding the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

Heritage Month

Several heritage months are recognized in September, including:

- Mexican
- Vietnamese
- Ukrainian
- Japanese





SMP In Action

In Early Childhood Spaces

As a Cultural Partner, Sabrina has worked with two programs in the pilot cohort, creating meaningful relationships with many conversations and ideas shared. She started with these programs by listening to their “stories” and used the Harold Johnson book “The Power of Story” for self-reflection. It helped to effectively guide the educators for the big project of Land acknowledgement that was about to begin.

In her words “We enjoyed a beautiful flower farm, had lunch together, then set off on an afternoon hike. The educators had the opportunity to share their story stones with the world. These stones were an open-ended activity where the educators could draw whatever they wanted on their stone and put it out into the world. The stones were all so unique and many paid homage to their individual cultures that were so beautiful to celebrate. We released what we needed into nature and set our intentions towards acknowledging the beautiful land we also call home. With educators' hearts full and minds curious, we could now pivot and work towards reflecting meaningfully on Land Acknowledgement with the children and families. We shared our process about creating Land Acknowledgements with families through documentation, invitation to join on field trips, requesting pictures of family time outdoors, and by posing questions about what they like to do in nature as families.”



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