



## CHAPTER 3

### EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The educational philosophy is the “essence” of your early childhood program. It describes the program in a few short paragraphs. The philosophy statement is usually included in the parent handbook, staff handbook, and promotional materials for your program. This helps people discover who you are and what your program is all about.

The sections in this chapter encourage you to think about what it means to be a quality early childhood program for Aboriginal children. The last part of the chapter lists the components of an educational philosophy. Two examples are included in the appendices.

An educational philosophy is based on the culture and values of the program staff, committee, and community. It reflects the unique nature of your program. Internal policies and procedures flow from the philosophy and set the structure for the program's daily operations.

The governance committee, parents, Elders, and community members should be involved in developing the educational philosophy of the program. Brainstorming sessions can help with this process.

***What is early childhood development?***

Before preparing the educational philosophy for your program, it is important to take some time to think about what early childhood development means to you. Try a brainstorming session. You may come up with themes similar to these:

Brain development

Physical development

Learning to communicate

Support to parents

Learning to solve problems

Early intervention for children who need extra support

Healthy pregnancy

Learning about heritage and culture

Learning to be independent

***What is a quality early childhood development program?***

It is also important to take some time to think about what you think a quality early childhood program should look like. You may identify some features like these:

Involves parents	Cares for children while parents work or study	Stimulating environment	Involves children and families in fun and learning	Participation in community events
Supports healthy child development	Safe and healthy environment	Teaches problem-solving skills		Licensed
Well-trained staff		Interaction with Elders	Lets children be free	Well-paid staff
	Teaches language	Prepares children for school	Teaches self-respect	Nutritious meals and snacks

***Emphasizing Aboriginal values***

Your early childhood program should emphasize the values that are important to your community. Some values that you may come up with are:

Cooperation and harmony		Importance of treating community members like family		Love
	Courage			
Sharing	Importance of extended family		Ties to the land	
Importance of interdependence and team-work	Humility	Learning by observation	Honesty	Respect
				Generosity

**A quality early childhood program for Aboriginal children may have the following goals:**

1. To express Aboriginal values.
2. To provide a stable and stimulating environment for children and their families.
3. To teach children to be proud of their culture and heritage.
4. To provide resources and support to families and others in the community.

**A quality early childhood program for Aboriginal children may have the following characteristics:**

1. A low adult: child ratio.
2. Space for children to be physically active.
3. Space for children to experience quiet time.
4. Interesting, stimulating, and culturally relevant activities.
5. A flexible, yet balanced and predictable routine.
6. Nutritious meals and snacks.
7. Qualified staff.
8. Activities and resources that support families.
9. A focus on the “whole child”.
10. Positive staff morale and professional development (See chapter 9).
11. Positive relationships between staff, children and families.
12. Parental involvement.
13. Community support.

Research on mainstream early childhood programs has shown that while licensing may not guarantee quality, program quality is likely to be higher in licensed programs than in non-licensed ones.

## ***The Whole Child***

The idea of the whole child stresses that children have physical, emotional, social, intellectual, linguistic, spiritual, and cultural needs. All of these needs must be met for a child to develop into a strong and healthy adult. The provincial *Child Care Regulation* suggests that child care programs:

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|--|---|
| <p>1. <b>Meet the physical needs of the child:</b> Children are encouraged in health, safety, and growth. Children learn to develop gross motor and fine motor skills.</p> | <p>4. <b>Meet the intellectual needs of the child:</b> Children get to try new things. Children learn to problem-solve and make decisions.</p>          |
| <p>2. <b>Meet the emotional needs of the child:</b> Children feel love, trust, and acceptance. Children learn to express emotions.</p>                                     | <p>5. <b>Meet the linguistic needs of the child:</b> Children learn positive language and listening skills. Children are encouraged to communicate.</p> |
| <p>3. <b>Meet the social needs of the child:</b> Children are encouraged, but not forced, to make friends. Children learn to relate to each other in positive ways.</p>    |   |

**You may also decide that your program will aim to:**

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|---|---|
| <p>1. <b>Meet the spiritual needs of the child:</b> Children learn a sense of belonging in the world.</p> | <p>2. <b>Meet the cultural needs of the child:</b> Children learn the language and traditions of their culture. Children learn how to interact appropriately with Elders.</p> |
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**Table 3-1 Sample indicators of a quality child care program**

Major Features	Quality Indicators
The program is culturally meaningful to the children and community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are encouraged to be proud of their heritage.</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to learn the language spoken by their ancestors.</li> <li>• Children have opportunities to participate in local cultural events.</li> </ul>
The setting encourages appropriate child-staff interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for one-on-one, small group, and large group activities.</li> <li>• Appropriate child:staff ratios.</li> <li>• The facility design, including windows, doors, bathrooms, classroom areas, and storage areas permits children to be seen at all times.</li> </ul>
The classroom supports a developmentally appropriate curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space, layout, equipment, and materials support learning opportunities (block area, dress-up and dramatic play areas, art area, and book corner are accessible).</li> <li>• There are places for child-initiated, self-selected activities.</li> <li>• Equipment and space are available for children to engage in small and gross motor physical activities (jumping, running).</li> </ul>
The classrooms are appropriate sizes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space is approved by local licensing office.</li> </ul>
The setting helps children develop independence and self-help skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have a convenient place to hang up their coats and cubbies to keep their belongings.</li> <li>• Furniture is child-sized.</li> <li>• Mirrors, water fountains, and washrooms are child-sized and accessible to children.</li> </ul>

Major Features	Quality Indicators
The physical environment is suitable for children with special needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The room meets local and provincial regulations for access.</li> <li>• The setting promotes mainstreaming of children with disabilities and is individualized in response to special needs.</li> </ul>
Space is designed for flexibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children can rearrange space for their own activities.</li> <li>• Children can move freely from area to area without disruption.</li> </ul>
The classroom environment promotes learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound absorbing materials are used.</li> <li>• There are separate quiet areas and active areas.</li> <li>• There is adequate lighting.</li> <li>• There are soft elements in the environment (carpets, pillows).</li> <li>• Space is provided for children's art work and projects, with displays at children's eye level.</li> </ul>
The outdoor playground is child-centred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing requirements for space are met.</li> <li>• Different surfaces and equipment encourage all types of play (wheel toys, slides, swing, kick ball, and sand play).</li> <li>• There is appropriate cushioning under climbing equipment.</li> <li>• There are both shady and sunny areas.</li> <li>• The playground is fenced in and protected.</li> </ul>
Facilities are safe, healthy, and sanitary for children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security policies ensure that all visitors are authorized.</li> <li>• Provincial and local licensing requirements are met.</li> <li>• Schedules are set for cleaning and inspection of equipment.</li> </ul>

## ***Educational philosophy***

In your philosophy, state:

### **Your program's principal goal.**

For example, "To provide a stimulating program for children ages 3-5 in an environment that teaches the values, language, and traditions of their ancestors."

### **Some of the ways that your program will address this goal.**

For example, "By providing weekly contact with Elders." "By involving children in cultural events in the community." "By providing cultural learning opportunities."

### **How children's behaviour will be guided.**

For example, "Children's behaviour will be guided through positive methods, such as natural and logical consequences, redirection, and problem-solving. Children will not be subject to physical or emotional punishment."

### **Other issues important to your program, such as a non-sexist and anti-racist approach.**

For example, "Our program values all children. Children will be encouraged to take pride in themselves, and to appreciate their similarities and differences."

### **How your program involves parents, Elders, and community members**

For example, "Parent/Elder participation is the core of our program. Parents/Elders are invited to visit the program at any time, and are encouraged to participate on the advisory board."

### **Staff qualifications, rights and responsibilities**

For example, "All of our staff are caring and competent caregivers." "Staff are encouraged to further develop their skills through professional development activities." "Staff are required to communicate respectfully with families."

### **Ethics**

For example, "All people involved in our program are required to abide by a confidentiality agreement." "Our program is accountable to our children, our families, and our broader community."

## REFERENCES

**\* Indicates resources available on loan through the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society.**

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## RESOURCES

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## APPENDIX 3-I

### LE'LUM'EL EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The logo done for Le'lum'el Day Care Centre represents the sun. It also represents children and the shine they bring to our faces and we adults shouldn't ruin that shine - please respect our children, like you would our elders, because they are our future! This is a quote from the person who designed the logo for Le'lum'el, Maynard Johnny Jr.

At Le'lum'el we have the belief that early childhood experiences are a crucially important period of development for any child. This phase in life is very critical and sensitive to a child's development, during which patterns of perceiving, knowing, learning and interacting with others are established.

Here at Le'lum'el we try to provide the best environment which emphasizes the integration of a wide range of social, emotional, cultural, historical and cognitive experiences in a child's day. We also emphasize the importance of child led activities in a safe stimulating environment with a minimum of adult intervention.

The programs at Le'lum'el are geared to provide many opportunities which will stimulate and nurture optimal development and growth. Our program offers the child natural vehicles for introduction to group situations, routines and a variety of different activities, which emphasizes independence, play and creativity.

Like other centres we offer a variety of different activities but unlike other centres we offer Cowichan teachings, language and a strong family commitment in our community. Our centre has Elder guidance and support, and a sense of love and pride in its culture.

Le'lum'el is much, much more. It is a centre with a philosophy that encompasses a holistic approach to the individual child's physical, mental, emotional, educational and spiritual development. The success of Le'lum'el stems from our commitment to Cowichan extended families, our emphasis on preventive family care and on our understanding of the diverse needs of children in our care.

## APPENDIX 3-II

# CALGARY NATIVE HEAD START PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT

The Calgary Native Head Start Program will strive to improve the quality of life for Native families through the provision of positive, contemporary and traditional teachings. The program will enable children's successful immersion into kindergarten and elementary levels of education. The Calgary Native Head Start Program will provide community members with information that enhances pride in our Native traditions and teachings.

Philosophy: We believe...

...Native children have the right to a quality cultural education, which includes teaching the roots and values of the Native heritage, as well as skills based in high self esteem to preserve this heritage.

...Native children and parents from financially challenged income levels have the right to an interactive and quality program that enhances parenting skills and provides knowledge which will result in an improved quality of life.

...The early intervention approach and networking with community agencies and services will meet the special needs of young children and families.

...The parent involvement in a child's education is a key motivating factor in encouraging academic success.