

Raising the bar [CA-BC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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The teachers call it "the atelier." A year or two ago, staff at Capilano University's childcare centre converted an extra office space into an experimental art room, what you might call a learning explosion. Right alongside those swaths of full-body toddler-art, the practicum students from Capilano U's companion Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs posted notes and essays about brain development, framed photos of the kids diving into the paint. Those student teachers reported back to their university classes about the types of questions kids ask when they're bathing in colour.

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The student-teachers are a hallmark of the childcare centre, widely known as one of if not the best childcare facilities on the North Shore. The university's ECCE program sends its students into the facility to work with the children and after graduation, some of those new educators end up as full-time staff at the centre.

So the partnership - the childcare centre and the early learning courses - was just the right fit for a new degree program in early childhood education, says Capilano coordinator Jen Moses. This fall 35 students joined in the degree stream, the first of its kind in Western Canada.

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One-hundred-seventy-three children make up the centre's waiting list.

Priority goes to students and to potential staff who hope to work there - Cook, for example, is a sociology professor at the university. The odd family outside the Cap U community makes it in, but the lineup to join the other 80 families who use the centre is only growing, says manager MacDonald.

The centre is the kind of place that actually keeps staff for decades in a field where the turnover for early childhood educators on the front lines is about three years, and this is one key draw for parents like Cook.

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That "terrible" pay facing graduates is part of a child care crisis according to the North Shore Child Care Resources and Referral program (NSCCRR).

A 2008 wage survey found most local childcare workers can expect to make between \$14 and \$18 per hour on the North Shore. Administrators and supervisors could make between \$20 and \$22 per hour.

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Fewer than 10 per cent held a pension plan and none were unionized.

Just over half of those surveyed had seen a salary increase in the previous two years.

This is the kind of bad-news sandwich Jen Moses, coordinator with Capilano's ECCE program, delivers unto the new recruits.

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Coordinator Jen Moses says the diploma and the new degree programs blend the concepts of childcare and education. We tend to think learning begins in kindergarten, she says, but the years from zero to six years old are a critical stage in the child development.

"We know what happens every day, every minute of a child's day is about learning and teaching and care," explains Moses. "They need to be respected and cared for and listened to and understood as engaging thinkers. So they may still need their diaper changed. They may need assistance to get up on a chair, but it doesn't mean they need somebody to do their thinking for them."

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More than 75 per cent of surveyed parents told the Canadian Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada that a lack of affordable childcare is a serious problem in this country. On the North Shore, placing an infant or a toddler in full-time childcare can cost anywhere between \$45 and \$150 per day.

-reprinted from North Shore Outlook

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

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