

WigWag



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Building Quality Child Care with Learning Language and Loving It™

Alex Iancovitz

Communications Assistant, The Hanen Centre

Family Day Care Services™ is a Toronto-based charitable organization dedicated to the care and education of young children. It provides child care to approximately 3000 children in the Greater Toronto Area, in both centre and home-based programs. Family Day employs over 300 child care practitioners and partners with over 300 home child care providers. As one of the largest and best recognized child-care providers in southern Ontario, it is once-again setting the benchmark for practitioner training and the provision of quality child care!

Joan Arruda, CEO of Family Day, as it is commonly known, recognized the need to continually strengthen and improve the quality of care provided to children. As a result, Family Day took on the not-so-minor task of training its *entire* child care staff in *Learning Language and Loving It* - the Hanen Program® for Early Childhood Educators and Teachers. They were looking for a comprehensive training model to compliment their "High/Scope" curriculum, enabling them to create language-rich environments in which children are engaged in frequent, stimulating interactions with educators and peers. In late 2004, they set sail. Little did they know that it would turn out to be a life-changing experience for their staff and associates, and a transformative process for the organization as a whole!

An organization-wide training initiative can be a difficult project to undertake for any organization. Recognizing that it would be difficult to get the entire staff to a *Learning*

Language and Loving It Program in a reasonable time-frame, Family Day elected to take advantage of Hanen's "Train the Trainer" model, and had three staff-members trained and certified to lead the program on their own. As a result, Family Day was able to set up a training schedule that worked for them, and allowed all of its practitioners to take part. The Hanen Centre provided the Family Day trainers with all the resources they needed to offer the program, making the training process "as easy and affordable as possible" according to Lisa Pecarski, one of the Family Day trainers. By early next year, Family Day's enthusiastic program leaders, Lisa Pecarski, Jill Poisson and Lisa Shortall (self-described as "Hanen's biggest fans!") will have trained over 160 child care staff in *Learning Language and Loving It!*

The Training Program

Adding supplemental training to a very busy work day in child care can be a challenge. After all, there are only so many hours in a day. However, in the case of *Learning Language and Loving It*, Family Day's trainers have successfully recruited staff to take the program. In the words of Lisa Pecarski, "The word is spreading that the program is worth taking!" And that's not hard to imagine when Family Day's practitioners describe the program as, "The most rewarding learning experience I've ever had in respect to early childhood education."

By making the training, "fun, not laborious", Family Day's energetic trainers have

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succeeded in creating enthusiasm for the program. Trainees particularly benefit from the videotape feedback segment of the *Learning Language and Loving It* program, which allows them to watch themselves in action, so to speak, and to evaluate and refine their application of program strategies. The ability to analyze and critique oneself is an invaluable opportunity which most people never get, and Family Day's practitioners are taking full advantage – continuously building on their ability to create language-rich, responsive environments for the children in their care! As a result, child care practitioners, “feel privileged to participate in such a wonderful learning opportunity”.

***Learning Language and Loving It* is making a difference!**

The results of Family Day's organization-wide training initiative have been immediately apparent. According to Joan Arruda, *Learning Language and Loving It* “has changed the way the child care providers interact with children in the program”. The child care practitioners are now more responsive to the children in their care, and that's not all. Family Day's child care providers enjoy a new-found confidence in their ability to encourage emerging language and literacy skills in children. Armed with effective, research-based tools and strategies to promote communication, they feel empowered to communicate with even the most shy, reluctant children – a group which they have traditionally found difficult to engage. Furthermore, practitioners fully “understand the value of interaction, and take more time with each child”. In that respect, *Learning Language and Loving It* has “leveled the playing field in terms of attention per child”.

Family Day was so impressed with the effects of the *Learning Language and Loving It* program on their organization that they have implemented a Teacher Talk™ workshop pilot program for their home child care providers. This is one of the first times that *Teacher Talk* is being offered to home child care providers from a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences, and thus far, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The participants say they have learned how to

provide good language models and the value of using a variety of labels to increase children's vocabulary. Moreover, they have learned several strategies which they can use to encourage language and literacy development in children, such as O.W.L (Observe, Wait, Listen), and how to extend the conversation to stimulate abstract and creative thinking. Family Day is looking forward to evaluating the results of the *Teacher Talk* pilot program in order to determine whether they will fully implement the training initiative for their home child care providers.

Research on the efficacy of the *Learning Language and Loving It* Program confirms what Family Day's child care practitioners have observed – that when teachers are more responsive, children talk more to both them and to other children, increasing their opportunities to learn language. Furthermore, when teachers focus on extending the conversation to include more complex and abstract language, children respond in kind. In improving their ability to support children's emergent language and literacy skills, Family Day's staff and associates encourage an enthusiasm for communication which will help children develop the strong social skills they need to become good friends to their peers and effective learners. This has the potential to have an enormous impact on the thousands of children who come through Family Day's doors every year.

Overall, both *Learning Language and Loving It* and *Teacher Talk* have succeeded in enhancing Family Day's ability to provide children with quality care. It is for this reason that Family Day's CEO and their three *Learning Language and Loving It* trainers speak so fondly of the program. In the words of Joan Arruda, “We have fun, it's a great program and we don't intend to give it up!” **WW**