

## The Bonfire: Thunder Bay's Pedagogical Network

We are deeply appreciative of the dialogue that has begun regarding the launching of a pedagogical network in Thunder Bay. The vision for this network is different from the idea that professional learning is something we consume. Rather, in a network, knowledge is constructed through reflective dialogue, through exchange of perspectives and sharing of experience with an invitation for response. We have a shared desire to elevate the view of the child in our communities, to move away from a deficit view and reveal the strategies, empathy, and intelligence of all children.

The statement of intention expressed the foundational belief that each participant brings knowledge and questions and experience that contribute to reflection, and to questioning our own assumptions and practices. A network of this sort is in keeping not only with the view of the child in *How Does Learning Happen?*, but also of the educator. The cover of the document says that it is "A resource about learning through relationships", and that is a key aspect of this proposed network.

The design of the network is that we would meet once a month, and that each gathering would include time in the large group where there would be a shared focus, often arising from what has been discussed in the break-out group conversations in prior meetings. That focus might take the form of sharing a piece of documentation that reveals a particular aspect of relationship, perhaps among children, or between adults and children. It might take the form of sharing a story of educators learning together by questioning long-standing practice as they seek congruity between stated views, and practice. The participants will give shape to the focus by participating in the dialogue – this is not a prepared course. In each gathering there will also be break-out groups where ideas can be discussed, and also where participants can share documentation / stories. These groups will be consistent so that trusting relationships can develop. The statement of intention described the values that will guide these gatherings.

We know from experience that it is important that there be consistency and commitment to participation in the network. It is key that conversations continue in the days and weeks between gatherings, and this is supported by having at least two participants from each program. And it is also important that the same people come to the gatherings, so that trusting relationships can develop within the small groups. We realize that once again, this is different from experiences that are designed so that there are "take-aways" that could be distributed to colleagues who were not present. Rather, this is a process, a way of being in a learning relationship where there are responsibilities to actively contribute to everyone's learning, and conversely to be receptive to other perspectives. The network is designed with sustainability in mind.

We also see the network as being strongly connected to recruitment and retention. We have seen a resurgence of joy in educators when they have had the opportunity to engage in this sort of pedagogical network. Comments such as "I thought I was ready to leave the field, but now I can't wait to get back on Monday morning to see what is

going to happen next” bear witness to this. It is energizing to participate in the construction of knowledge. Children do it every day.

We realize that accommodations will have to be made within each program, and that it will vary, but we hope that because you can choose either a daytime and an evening option, you will be able to find ways to prioritize engagement in this network.

Your community is on a leading edge, and we are honoured to be invited to be with you.