Side By Side Consulting Services
Professional Learning Catalogue



Owner & Early Learning Consultant: Victoria Armstrong, BECS
victoria@sbsconsulting.ca
www.sbsconsulting.ca
416-275-8127

About SBS Consulting Services

Children are inquisitive, competent, creative, compassionate, generous and joyful human beings. They are full of wonder, thoughtful ideas, and an eagerness to form relationships with people, materials and their environment. When we as the adults in their lives slow down and listen with our bodies, minds and hearts, children reveal to us new ways to see and appreciate the world and show us how we can live joyously, lovingly and with purpose. Our role therefore is to cultivate beautiful environments full of open ended materials, thoughtfully designed spaces and generous allotments of time so that children can explore and express their ideas fearlessly.

For this reason, **Side By Side Consulting Services partners with early years organizations to support and enhance their work with children and families.** Together, we dig deeper into what it means to create these kinds of joyful and thoughtful environments so that children can be all that they were created to be.

For over 15 years, Victoria Armstrong, owner of Side By Side (SBS) Consulting Services, has devoted her life to living out this view of children and supporting and challenging others to live out this view of children also. A published author and dance instructor, she has held a variety of roles throughout her early learning career; Classroom Educator, Pedagogical Leader, College Professor, HR and Communications Specialist, Coordinator and Early Learning Consultant. A large part of her career was dedicated to the pioneering and growth of a children's art initiative that integrated local artists into early learning and licensed child care programs. Her passion for the arts in early childhood along with giving visibility to children's thinking through the process of pedagogical documentation is what has given her career specific direction over the past 10+ years.

Victoria is a thoughtful, reflective and collaborative leader who challenges others to live from their values, build on their strengths and push themselves to think deeper about why they do what they do and how they can live with intentionality every day in their work.



In addition to over a decade in the field and working with many children, families and early years professionals, she continues to be inspired daily by her young sons who are the reason for her creation of The Studio. She also holds full bronze level certification in American ballroom and latin dance styles.

If you're looking to dig deeper into your practice, develop innovative ideas, live with intentionality and thoughtfulness in your work and be provoked and challenged to take new risks, then connect with Victoria to see where your work together can take you.







Schema Play: Noticing and Building Upon Children's Innate Desires

"Schemas are a fancy word for the urges that children have to do things like climb, throw things and hide in small places... They are the building blocks for the brain, repeated behaviour that in turn forge connections in the brain, patterns of unfolding, learning and growth... By knowing about schemas, we can recognize and support their urges and development," (Caro, 2012). During this 1.5 hour session, we'll chat about 9 common schemas including Orientation, Positioning, Connection, Trajectory, Enclosure, Transporting, Enveloping, Rotation and Transformation, and consider ways that we can build upon what we are observing.
**This PL Session can also be offered as an extended 2 Part Series*

Observing to Listen: Building Deep Relationships with Children through Observation and Documentation

What are you looking for? What we look for is what we're going to see. If we believe children are competent, curious, creative and caring people, then we need to be intentional about looking for those things in our work with children. As we do, we come to see children for who they really are and begin to build deep and authentic relationships with them. In this 1.5 hour session, participants will build their observation and documentation skills so that they can create deeper relationships with the children in their programs.

Documenting, Studying and Sharing Children's Ideas

Pedagogical documentation is a process that invites us into a great story; a place where we get the privilege of capturing, reflecting upon, sharing and celebrating the incredible brilliance of children. As we strive to be great storytellers, keen observers and thoughtful listeners, we are given the opportunity of exploring more of who we are as we notice more of who children really are. During this 1.5 hour session, we'll explore the complex yet joyful and nourishing process of pedagogical documentation.
**This PL Session can also be offered as an extended 2 Part Series*





Growing a Culture of Inquiry through Teacher Research

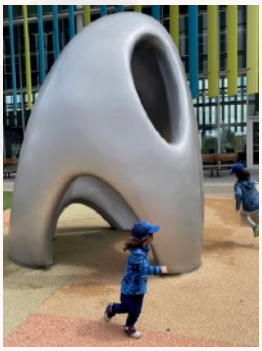
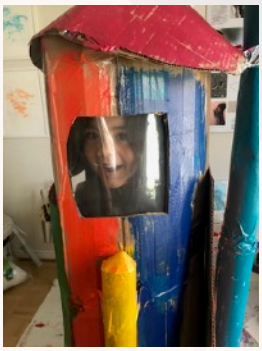
Children are researchers; constantly observing, experimenting, and testing out theories. Educators are researchers also; listening to children's ideas and responding with various material and space arrangements and questions to provoke thinking. When educators build on this and create intentional research questions that can be studied over a long period of time, relationships deepen, children's competencies are clearer, and environments become deeply purposeful and rich in meaning. During this 1.5hr session, discover more about what teacher research is, how you can form a question for study, and how you can document and share your findings with others.

Reflections on the Value and Possibilities of Recycled Materials in Children's Play

Bottle caps are buttons on a space shuttle, an empty wrapping paper tube is a telescope, leftover laminate is the windshield on a cardboard car. Recycled materials hold infinite possibilities. Children naturally see these possibilities and breathe new life into materials that we as adults might otherwise discard. In this 1.5 hour session, we'll think together about the important role recycled materials hold in children's play and how we can nurture and deepen this natural relationship between children and recycled materials. We will also take some time ourselves to explore the possibilities of a few recycled materials.

Art Experiences to Support Children's and Educator's Mental Health

Whether child or adult, engaging in the arts can provide positive mental health benefits, helping to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety and giving us an opportunity to be present, to be mindful and to engage in practices that are restorative and calming. During this 1.5hr session, participants will engage in discussion about the connection between the arts and mental health and be offered ideas for art experiences that children and educators can engage in as a way of supporting their mental health.


Art Experiences Inspired by the Natural World - 2 Part Series

In Session 1, we'll begin by thinking about the importance of the arts in children's lives and the possibilities that exist when we view the arts as languages for communication, thinking and expression. Together, we'll also engage in an exploration of a visual art medium in conjunction with nature.

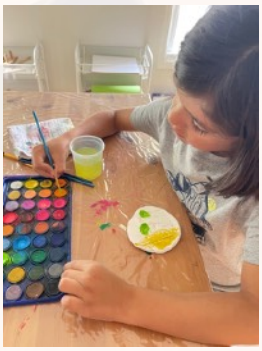
In Session 2, we'll explore ideas for art materials, processes and provocations that invite children to connect with the natural world through the arts. We'll also engage in some nature inspired art provocations during the session.

Process? Product? Examining Our Ideas About Young Children and The Arts

What is art? Why do we engage in artistic experiences with young children? What are children pursuing in their relationships with art materials? What values and beliefs do we hold about young children and the arts and do our practices align with these? What if there's more to the arts with young children than process and product? Do common mantras like 'process based art' speak to the complexity that is inherent in children's pursuits with art materials? Together, in this 1.5 hour session, lets deconstruct 'process' and 'product' in children's art experiences and consider what other possibilities might exist for children if we shifted some of our language, thinking and practices.

The Arts as Languages for Thinking and Expression

The arts hold infinite possibilities for children to express themselves, think deeply about the world around them and communicate their questions, theories and ideas. In this session, we'll think about the value of the arts in children's lives, along with the importance of offering quality materials, experiences and supportive relationships as children engage in artistic ways in our programs. Practical ideas for materials and experiences will be offered as well as time for participants to experiment with an art medium.





Reflecting on Our Environment: Connecting Our Image of the Child with Space, Materials and Time - 2 Part Series

Children deserve environments that are beautiful, thoughtfully designed and offer them opportunities to investigate, wonder and linger with ideas. To do this, we must first take time to reflect on our view of children as it guides everything we say and do. In this 2 part series, we'll begin by exploring our image of the child and whether it is being reflected in the spaces that we are creating for children as well as in our relationships with them. Then, we'll engage in a variety of reflective activities around our own physical environments, materials and ways we use and schedule our time.

Cultivating Children's Relationships with the Natural World through the Use of Art Materials - 3 Part Summer Art Series

In Session 1, we'll explore what current literature has to say about the importance of the natural world and art in children's lives and what our role is in facilitating these relationships. Resources such as books and articles will be shared for further reading.

In Session 2, we'll hear and see examples from a visual artist who uses the natural world in her work as well as hear more about her relationships with nature and art. We'll also try out some outdoor drawing exercises and reflect on how our relationship with an item from the natural world deepened as a result of the exercise.

In Session 3, we'll consider the value of creating an outdoor studio. What could an outdoor studio look like? Feel like? Would it be a permanent or transient space? Or have elements of both permanency and fluidity? Would there be a difference in the materials that are offered outdoors vs indoors? What possibilities does an outdoor studio hold that an indoor studio doesn't? How could space be used? What elements could tie the indoor and outdoor studios together?





Relationships through Research: Cultivating Connection and Engagement with Children and Families through Teacher Research - 3 Part EarlyON Series

EarlyON programs are bubbling with endless possibilities for curiosity, creativity, innovation and connection. Through intentional research questions, we can deepen our understanding of who children are, the competencies they hold and the ideas they have as we listen and observe carefully, think with one another and respond thoughtfully.

Part 1: Forming the Question - Brainstorming Together

Research begins with a question. In Part 1, we'll begin by diving into what teacher research is, how and what we observe, what makes a researchable question and how we can go about forming a specific question for research with other colleagues and families. At the end of this session, participants will have a process that they can utilize, with families, to create a researchable question for their programs.

Part 2: Studying the Question - Looking Together

Once we have a question ready to study, we are ready to listen and look closely. In Part 2, we'll look at multiple ways to document children's thinking and ideas, in response to our research question. This includes creating a research board, a parent/caregiver documentation invitation and sharing secondary research on our topic with families. We'll then think about how to look for big ideas and overarching themes in the documentation that we are capturing as a way of pulling our research together. At the end of this session, participants will have tangible ideas for documenting answers to their research question with families.

Part 3: Sharing the Findings - Celebrating Together

Once we've spent time listening, observing, gathering artefacts of children's thinking and ideas, studying and thinking together, we have the opportunity to celebrate all that we've learned and share this learning with others outside of our programs. In Part 3, we'll look at a basic design theory and how it can help us to create captivating and meaningful displays that others will want to engage with. We'll also consider specific ways to display our research for meaningful engagement.







The Wonder Series: Re-Engaging with the Process of Pedagogical Documentation - 3 Part Series

Pedagogical documentation is a process of inquiry, not a final product on a wall. In this series, we'll explore the different components that are part of the process of pedagogical documentation and reflect on where we are in our own journeys and the possibilities for where we could go next.

Part 1: Inviting Wonder: The Role of Space, Materials and Time in Children's Learning
Children deserve environments that are beautiful, thoughtfully designed and offer them opportunities to investigate, wonder and linger with ideas. This is also the first step in the process of pedagogical documentation. If we want to be able to capture children's natural curiosities about the world, then we need to give careful thought to their environment. When we do, the possibilities for what to document are endless!

Part 2: Observing Wonder: The Role of Documentation in Children's Learning
When we have environments that invite curiosity and wonder, we can then take time to observe, listen carefully and document what children are curious about and thinking about in their environment. Documentation invites us to slow down, pause and notice what captures children's attention and to bring our own questions about children, teaching and learning to our work.

Part 3: Studying Wonder: The Role of Adult Reflection, Interpretation and Collaboration in Children's Learning
What makes documentation pedagogical? It's when we learn more about the teaching-learning process through studying what we notice. To do this, we make time to think about our documentation together with others. We listen, we ask questions, we wonder, we reflect and through this, we make decisions about where to go next with what we are noticing.







Creating a Visual Art Studio in an Early Learning Classroom - 2 Part Series

Part 1: Creating the Studio: Space and Material Considerations

How can you set up an inspiring visual art space in your classroom that will invite children to build relationships with art materials? In this session, we'll think about the physical layout and materials to include in the space as well as initial provocations to invite children into the studio to linger with materials and build relationships.

Part 2: Documenting, Display and Integrating Art into the Whole Classroom

What can you look for when documenting art experiences? What might be important to capture? How can you share these experiences through display? How can you move art from the studio into the rest of the classroom where it can be used as a tool for thinking, connecting and sharing with others? In this session, we'll consider all these questions as we think about how best to now use our new studio space.

All sessions can either be facilitated in-person or online. To book a session, please email Victoria Armstrong at: victoria@sbsconsulting.ca





