

UBC Childcare, Vancouver, Canada

When Nanritam had started the Filix School of Education in 2014 several challenges confronted the organisers

a) Problem of getting adequately capable teachers in such remote rural areas;

b) English is not necessary for students in rural areas as a language of communication, even though it is seen as the path to growth as a student and as an earner, Conversation in English among the children themselves are supposed to address this gap, but how do we do that?

c) The translation method is widely used in rural areas. This method impedes learning of the language and the teaching of content and theme gains importance, d) the homework given to children focuses on repeating what they have done in class, which adds little value to the child from a learning perspective; and

d) The rural milieu provides little opportunity for children (and teachers) to practice the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English as part of their daily lives, it is important to continuously develop and use affordable tools to help facilitate this.



Nanritam's quest for answers to these questions has been driving them to visit schools in other countries confronting (and overcoming) these challenges, and one of the schools they had visited, immediately after starting Filix in April 2014 (with nursery, KG 1 and KG 2 classes only) was the University of British Columbia (UBC) Early Child Care Centre in Vancouver, Canada, in May 2014.

The UBC Child Care Services operates just under six hundred licensed spaces in twenty-five locations on campus and employs more than a hundred and twenty early childhood educators.

The basic philosophy of the services is that children thrive within warm, sensitive caring relationships; that play enhances children's well-being, creativity, and knowledge(s) and that challenge produces critical thinking skills and learning possibilities. These beliefs guide their approach to child care including caregiving, relationships with families, inclusion, behaviour guidance and all other aspects of the curriculum.

They understand play to be self-controlled and self-directed. In play children consider relationships between people, living beings, materials, and physical places. The play is essential in developing critical thinking abilities and creativity. In their centres, children spend their days exploring their world with ample opportunities to play in both indoor and outdoor environments. They believe that learning, including physical, cognitive and social/emotional learning occurs within an optimal challenge. Limited challenge offers limited potential while too much challenge overwhelms. With this idea in mind, they build risk into their child education programmes while monitoring individual safety.

We were taken around the centre at Vancouver by Ms. Deb Thompson, the Manager of the Centre who introduced us to the teachers, who in turn explained to us their approach to child care services.

The children in the centre were of varied age, and for many of them, English was a second language. They sat in small groups, engaged in various forms of practical but joyful learning, some toying with kitchen utensils, other laying the table for having the lunch prepared at the school itself.

In another room, children were having circle time with their teacher. We couldn't enter that room as that would distract them.

Outside classroom children were climbing up trees, digging in sands, filling up jars of different sizes with sand – a play that subtly builds up the child's concept of measurement. There was an area earmarked as a "Risk Taking Zone" where 4-5-year-olds were climbing up ladders to land up on a narrow (about 4" wide)

wall-top. Deb told us that in winter the children are taken to the forest where they collect pieces of wood and light a bonfire.

Deb emphasised on the value of "life-skill" training of the children which ought to start from a very early age in order to prepare them for facing the everyday challenges of living comfortably as grown-ups.

Toilet training is another important subject which is much emphasized upon.

Deb said that for children from 'non-English' speaking background they initially try to engage a teacher who can speak the child's language.

The tour was an "eye-opener" for us. We realised that Play is essential for optimal development and enhances every aspect of children's development and learning.

The Nanritam Team also understood the close relationship between symbolic play and literacy development. The focus should be in increasing opportunities for rich symbolic play that would have a positive influence on literacy development.

After they came back the first thing that they did was to construct an outdoor play area within our (former) school building.

Procured a whole lot of play things for the children because they were convinced that;

a) Block building and sand and water play lay the foundation for logical mathematical thinking, scientific reasoning, and cognitive problem solving;

b) Rough-and-tumble play develops social and emotional self-regulation and is of particular importance in the development of social competence in boys;

c) Pretend play fosters communication, developing conversational skills, turn taking, perspective taking, and the skills of social problem solving— persuading, negotiating, compromising, and cooperating. It requires complex communication skills and as they develop skill in pretend play, they begin to converse on many levels at once, becoming actors, directors, narrators, and audience, slipping in and out of multiple roles; and

d) Children learn by combining their ideas, impressions, and intuitions with experiences and opinions. They create ideas about their world and share them with one another. They establish a culture and a social world with their peers. Play allows children to make sense of their experiences and discover the intimacy and joy of friendship. When it is self-directed, play leads to feelings of competence and self-confidence.

They also realised that this is what India's own geniuses like Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda have trying to tell the nation roughly a century ago.

Google photo link for this school to be attached

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPqewMAaXvxPAh0NEsIWFbKeaLsi5ZYtqPe0goZp9OMO3jHOTl_1vVCeLF_3FW4Q?key=b1I3OENvdTc1bXFvckZScjdGWm9SVUhNZ3IFNHJR