

LOT Mentorship: Learning That Lasts

Photovoice Report for
Learning Outside Together
Mentorship Program, 2025



Jessica McQuiggan, Kemi Odegbile, and Sydney Rossiter

LOT Mentorship Program

Gratitude

Photovoice projects depend on participant investment of time, creativity, and personal reflection. We thank the Photovoice participants for sharing their voices with us and for their important contributions to the field as educators and mentors.

Learning Outside Together takes place across the province of British Columbia, home to more than 200 First Nations and Métis communities. We are grateful to the Indigenous caretakers of this land for their ongoing stewardship.

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LOT Mentorship Program

Introduction

The Learning Outside Together (LOT) program is a 12-week professional development program designed to support early childhood educators' skills, confidence, and knowledge to facilitate outdoor play with children. Managed by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) and the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC), the content of the LOT program is grounded in principles of Two-Eyed Seeing and encourages ECEs to incorporate traditional Indigenous knowledge and practice, such as Land as Teacher, into outdoor learning. Participants of the LOT program complete asynchronous online modules, engage in personal outdoor reflection activities, and participate in weekly group discussions about the content with other program participants.



Program Description

Group discussions are facilitated by peer mentors – LOT alumni who have previously completed the program, applied to be a mentor and were hired to return for the LOT mentorship program. Mentors facilitate participant learning by organizing discussion groups and guiding participants through the content. Mentors also engage in administrative tasks such as tracking and submitting professional development (PD) hours. LOT mentorship training generally consists of four webinars or training modules related to collaborative learning relationships, group formation, complexities and typical challenges, as well as facilitation skills and logistical considerations. Continuing the peer mentorship model, mentors can also apply to become mentor-facilitators, who guide mentors through the LOT program.

The purpose of the mentorship program is to bolster participant learning and engagement with the LOT program, as well as facilitate leadership skills-building. Furthermore, allowing ECEs to move from a “participant” to “mentor” to “mentor-facilitator” roles promotes sustainability for the LOT program, as learners help to guide future cohorts.

Following Cohort 5 of the LOT program, mentors were invited to share their experiences of the mentorship program through a Photovoice project led by LOT’s evaluation partner, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC). This evaluation report describes mentors’ general experiences and key outcomes in their own words.

Photovoice

Overview of the Photovoice Process

Photovoice is a participatory research methodology with three main goals¹:

1. Enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns,
2. Promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and
3. Reach policymakers

Photovoice was selected as the data collection tool for this evaluation because it provides participants with a unique opportunity to describe their experiences and share feedback in their own voice. Moreover, Photovoice has been successfully used previously in LOT and is generally perceived as a culturally relevant and reciprocal way of establishing shared understanding of participants'/mentors' conceptualizations of the outcomes of LOT.

In June 2025, LOT administrators sent invitations to all former mentors for whom contact information was available (approximately 80) to take part in the Photovoice evaluation. Ten former mentors were selected to participate in the three-phase evaluation process – orientation, photography, and discussion – which is described below. Photovoice participants² were asked to reflect on their time in the LOT mentorship program and share their experiences using photography, written and oral narratives, and discussion.

¹Wang C, Burris MA. Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. Health Educ Behav. 1997 Jun;24(3):369-87. doi: 10.1177/109019819702400309. PMID: 9158980.

²Throughout this report, we use 'Photovoice participants' or 'participating mentors' to distinguish participants in the Photovoice sample from LOT program participants and LOT mentors broadly.



Photovoice



Orientation

The ten participating mentors were invited to participate in a 1-hour virtual orientation session led by SRDC researchers to learn about the Photovoice project and its methods. Participating mentors were introduced to the five framing questions associated with the project and were provided with tips and advice on how to take photographs in a responsible and ethical manner.

Framing Questions

Framing questions were developed by SRDC and reviewed by LOT partners (BCACCS and ECEBC) in advance of the orientation session. The questions were designed to prompt Photovoice participants to reflect on different aspects of the mentorship experience. The questions for this project were:

What picture would you take if you were to...

1. Tell a friend about the LOT mentorship program and what was unique about it?
2. Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT?
3. Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing?
4. Show an example of how a LOT mentor helped a participant or others overcome barriers to outdoor play?
5. Share a message about the importance of mentorship for ECEs with decision-makers? (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

Photovoice

Photography

Over the course of three weeks, Photovoice participants chose two framing questions to address, then took photographs and reflected on how their photos could be used to address the framing questions. At the end of the three weeks, participants submitted two photos along with accompanying captions and reflection narratives by email to SRDC. One mentor was unable to continue at this stage. The SRDC research team collected the submissions and presented them in a group discussion with the remaining nine participating mentors.

Discussion

Photovoice participants joined a 2.5-hour virtual group discussion session, in which each mentor discussed their photos, narratives, and experiences with the rest of the group. The group then reflected on each submission while SRDC researchers moderated the conversation. Following the discussion session, SRDC researchers identified common themes and highlighted quotations to summarize the discussion.

Photovoice

Photovoice Stories

All participating mentors shared that they enjoyed the overall process of Photovoice, especially in terms of seeking out photo opportunities and reflecting on how their images related to the framing questions. While none had participated in Photovoice prior to this project, most stated that they were keen on taking photos and did so often in their everyday lives. Some mentioned having an interest in journaling and found the writing component of the project satisfying, whereas others had less experience in this area and found creating narratives to be an interesting challenge for them. In short, they approached all phases of the project with enthusiasm and curiosity.

This section includes all 18 photos and narratives that were collected for this evaluation. Photovoice participants' photos and narratives (displayed in brown text) are presented as provided, aside from slight edits for clarity and/or privacy. This report was shared with Photovoice participants in advance to ensure their perspectives continued to be accurately reflected. The main themes from the discussion are summarized below along with the photographs and narratives for each framing question.

Photovoice Stories

Although the evaluation focuses on the mentorship component of LOT, all mentors are former participants and so the distinction between the LOT program content and the experience of being a LOT mentor is not always clear. Indeed, Photovoice participants shared that **engaging with the LOT program again as a mentor – from a different lens – was among the most impactful elements of the mentorship program**, more so than the mentor-specific training modules. Thus, while efforts are made throughout the analysis to identify unique impacts of the mentorship program specifically, it is not possible to functionally separate them from the LOT program. As such, benefits of the mentorship program include benefits perceived by LOT mentors *and* LOT participants in their own practice with children (that is, outside of the LOT context).



Framing Question

#1

Tell a Friend About the LOT Mentorship Program and What was Unique About It

This question was designed to identify how the LOT mentorship program differs from other potential PD opportunities for ECEs. Participating mentors described the LOT mentorship program being unique in a number of ways, both in form and function.

One unique feature was the emphasis on **community building and collaboration with ECEs outside of their workplace**. As part of the mentorship program, mentors met regularly with the same group of ECEs for discussions about the LOT content. Photovoice participants described these discussion groups as being opportunities to build connections with ECEs from diverse backgrounds that have similar interests. One mentor suggested that meeting with ECEs outside of the structures of their individual workplaces was a novel experience that aided in creating more personal connections (see Let's Talk, slide 18). Mentors deeply appreciated the opportunity to network and share resources with other mentors and peers, which they describe as being a unique experience that they do not often have. As one mentor described:

“What an amazing opportunity to learn from other people who I would never meet because I'm at work full time. Where would I meet them? I mean, as ECEs, we're on the floor all the time. I don't have an opportunity to talk.”

Tell a friend about the LOT mentorship program and what was unique about it

Mighty and Tiny

Particularly in a field like early childhood education, which is rooted in relationships, Photovoice participants appreciated how the LOT mentorship program encouraged shared learning.

Overall, there was consensus that mentors benefitted from their role in LOT, with some Photovoice participants saying they “got more” out of being a mentor in LOT than they did as a participant. Participating mentors described being appreciative of having the opportunity to engage with materials again, suggesting that simply returning to material in a structured and supported way was a unique element of LOT mentorship.

*“Even those who are small can have a big impact in their environment. The yellow-spotted millipede is a keystone species in the soil’s ecosystem and as ECEs we are well aware of the impact children create in their own environments. Those boots are incredibly small compared to mine, but they are giant over the millipede. The LOT mentorship can seem small scale, but it has had moments where I felt challenged. I am committed to my participants and truly want them to succeed. I want them to feel welcome in the program whether they have little experience being outside with children or even overcoming language barriers in group discussions. Truthfully, I have obtained more from this course as a mentor than as a participant. I can take away so much from our group discussions and have the time to be thoughtful, reflect and come back the next week with more content to discuss. **Being a mentor keeps the program alive in my day-to-day activities.** – LOT Mentor*



Tell a friend about the LOT mentorship program and what was unique about it

Photovoice participants also described feeling a **sense of shared experience** with the participants in their discussion groups, noting that participants and mentors contributed to conversations as equals. The title of mentor was described as a “misnomer” by one Photovoice participant, who suggested instead that the mentors were experiencing the LOT journey together with participants. This peer mentorship component was highlighted as a unique feature of LOT.

“Mentor-Facilitators of LOT revealed so many wonderful things educators have to offer and brought out the knowledge I have about connecting Indigenous culture, learning on the land and the field of early childhood. Along the way though I learned so much from them too as I do from the children I teach. So the layers of fallen leaves moist from a fresh rain surrounded by the new growth of the green ferns encapsulates the Mentor-Facilitator dynamic. Bringing experience together with new fresh ideas, learning and growing together.” – LOT Mentor

Growing Together

Tell a friend about the LOT mentorship program and what was unique about it

*"If I was to tell a friend about LOT, I would say DO IT! It's such a great workshop series that is well laid out, provides great support and I would suggest documenting as you go. Get a notebook and record a bit about each participant and if they attended. You can use the notebook LOT provides."
– LOT Mentor*

With this photo, the mentor described taking time in advance of each group discussion to revisit themes from previous discussions. This allowed them to make their mentorship discussion sessions more meaningful and "personal."

Photovoice participants expressed that participating in the mentorship program prompted them to engage more mindfully in everyday life. There was a consensus that the **mentorship program renewed their desire to "slow down"** and appreciate their surrounding environment. Although the importance of mindfulness was first introduced in discussions about the uniqueness of the LOT mentorship program, it permeated throughout the Photovoice discussion and reappears as a theme in many of the subsequent narratives and discussions. As one mentor described:

"I really feel like the mentorship program solidified for me, like, 'look up, look up.' You don't just look ahead. Don't look at your feet... the mentorship program took it to another level where you are encouraged to really notice those things and just honour it and honour those moments."

Taking Time for Myself to Be Prepared



Tell a friend about the LOT mentorship program and what was unique about it



Take a Moment

*"A California Scrub Jay usually lives in, well, California. When I first saw this little beauty a month or two ago, I had to look up what kind of bird he was, so, without sounding too cheesy, he is as unique to BC as the LOT mentorship program was to me. The opportunity to see him fly and flitter around our school almost daily has delighted all of us. We have discovered that he lives in a tree beside the school playground which has provided plenty of sightings and observations. **The LOT program has solidified in me the importance of stopping and looking at the details and the big picture.** Look up at the sky, the clouds, the birds, listen to my surroundings when I'm in nature, stop, be still, perhaps even let the strange lady get close and take your picture."*

– LOT Mentor

Framing Question

#2

Demonstrate How Your Mentorship Journey has Changed as a Result of LOT

Recognizing that outcomes of LOT mentorship can be highly personal and extend beyond the program content, this question was designed to elicit the most important changes from the perspectives of the participating mentors. Much of the discussion about how their mentorship journey has changed related to an expanded conceptualization of what mentorship is and could be, particularly regarding the peer-centred approach of LOT.

Participating mentors reiterated that their **goal as mentor was to be a supporting role in participants' learning**, rather than mentors having an authority over participants in the program. They described appreciating that their role was not to “sit there” and lecture at participants, but rather to be their “cheerleader” who is taking notes and learning alongside them. The importance of viewing participants and mentors as equal contributors to LOT was emphasized strongly by the mentors in the group, and some pointed out that this was a refreshing change of pace from more hierarchical Western models of mentorship. As one Photovoice participant described:

“I think that there's a lot of encouragement that's still needed for the participants...checking in, [they'll ask] ...'is that right?' It's like, 'well, this is what I see. It's not right or wrong.'... Participants actually do need that cheerleader, [someone to say] 'you can do it. I know you're behind. It's okay. You'll make it.'”

Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

This relational, reciprocal approach to mentorship represented a welcome alternative to more structured/formal styles of mentorship often experienced within workplaces.

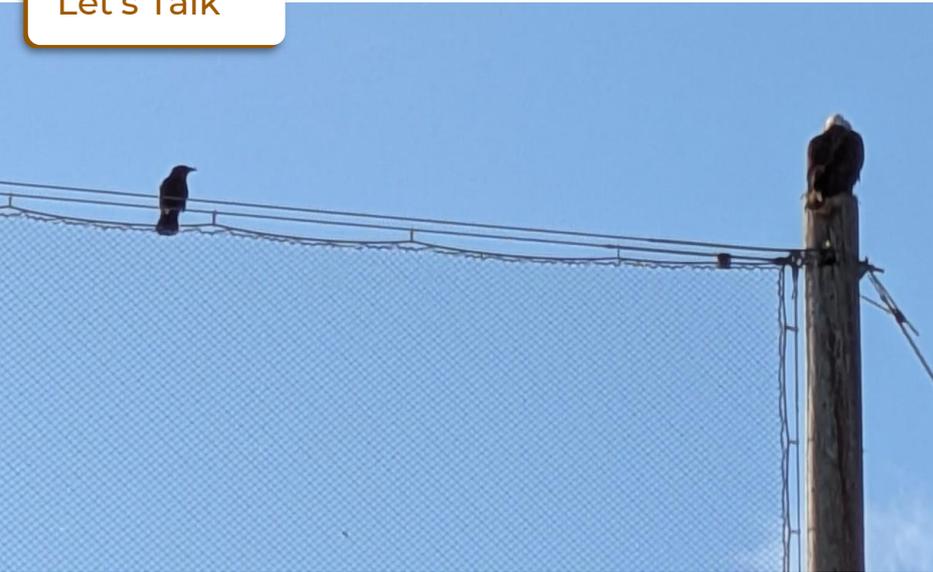
*“The trees, lake, open grassy spaces create a peaceful atmosphere and the beauty of nature! At the beginning of the LOT program, I expected to be inspired to take learning outdoors messages into our childcare programs. While this did happen, this journey became so much more than that. As a mentor, I saw my role as mainly providing guidance and support! However, meeting weekly from October to February, we didn’t just participate in a program, it’s about learning outside “TOGETHER”. We formed a COMMUNITY! My facilitator and my group of participants came from different parts of BC, each of us bringing/sharing our own unique experiences and resources. **The LOT program helped me to see mentorship as a shared journey.** It deeply enriched my practice while I’m “ENJOYING NATURE”.“ – LOT Mentor*



Enjoying Nature!

Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

Let's Talk



"Because I am older and have been working with children for over 30 years my boss often tells me it is my responsibility to mentor new or inexperienced teachers, such as through hosting student teachers. But the LOT mentorship program is unique in that the participants are from a diverse pool of likeminded individuals. The educators in my group varied in ages, ethnicities and experiences and I feel like this provided the opportunity to mentor in a more abstract, conceptual way than I would in person, in my own classroom. The [LOT] journey is about ideas, interpretations, experiences, more give and take, whereas in person mentorship, with new teachers, tends to be more instructional, more imparting of my prior experiences.

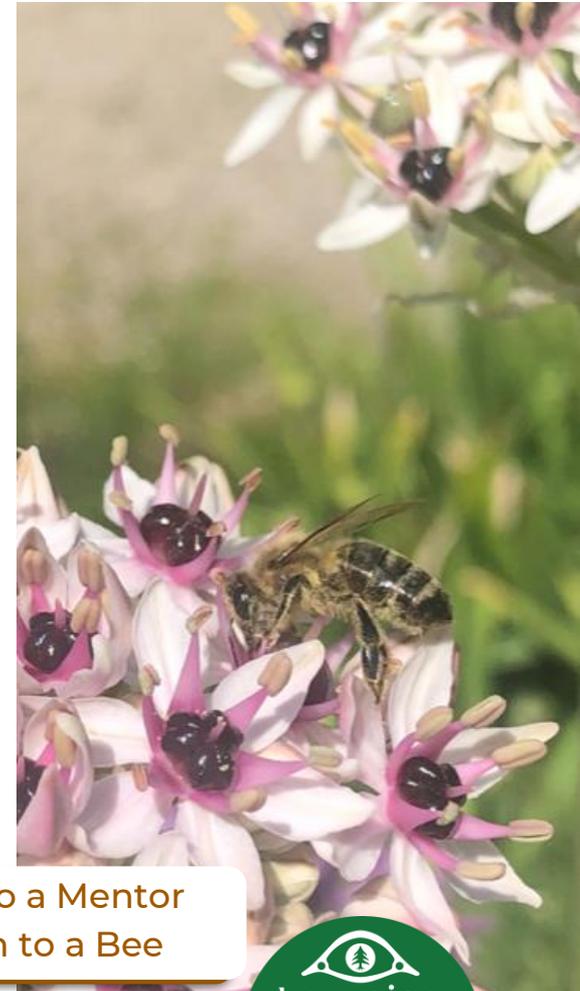
*I am like a crow, in that I love to communicate, I have always marveled at the complex sounds crows make to communicate so many different things and I found that I really enjoyed **having a chance to talk and listen to fellow educators, to learn from them, to mentor in a more reciprocal manner about being outside** personally and with our students and our sharing of ideas and strategies regarding outdoor learning. I don't know if my participants were bald eagles but they were sitting on that wire with me, chatting about nature and the wonders of the world around us."*

– LOT Mentor

Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

*"Being a mentor to me meant helping to facilitate communication. It meant supporting, listening and lifting up other Early Childhood Educators so they could be more aware of the possibilities and be comfortable in the uncomfortable. I chose this photograph that I recently took of a bee gathering pollen in the VanDusen Gardens in Vancouver. Bees live in organized social structures working together to achieve a common goal. I feel that my group worked towards a common goal as well; learning about the LOT program and learning more about how to use the outdoors as another classroom. As a mentor to a diverse group of educators, I attempted to lead with compassion and support. Like a bee, I am hardworking, diligent, and make a contribution to society but I also have a defense stinger! **I used this opportunity to speak slower and with intention, welcoming and learning from the varied perspectives and experiences.** I was mindful and supportive but also clear in the goal and my expectations. Like a bee who gets frightened and can lash out and sting you, I was proud to be a mentor and wanted to showcase the LOT program and all that I valued from it as a participant. I didn't sting anyone in the process and was honoured to have mentored an amazing group of ECEs." – LOT Mentor*

Gathering Knowledge to a Mentor
is like Gathering Pollen to a Bee



Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

Photovoice participants generally praised the mentorship program as being a positive experience, although some pointed out that being a mentor can still be a challenging role that comes with growing pains. They acknowledged that “*you don’t know how things are going to go*” and that one of the ways their mentorship journey changed was by **practicing how to become more comfortable with unpredictability**. Some Photovoice participants reported feeling “vulnerable” and “protective” of their group of participants, as the groups become very close over the course of the program. This vulnerability was described as being initially scary but ultimately rewarding and a valuable aspect of mentorship. As one mentor described:

“[Being a mentor,] you’re fighting your fear of guiding these people that you’ve never met in a program that you, I hope, love. But it is scary. So you have to get close to the scary and the uncomfortable.”

These mentors described gaining a better understanding of how to face challenges and fears related to mentoring by learning through experience in a supported environment.



Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

Photovoice participants also emphasized that **self-care and mindfulness practices** are central to mentorship and are important skills that they gained from the program. They appreciated the importance of slowing down and taking time for themselves, mentioning that they engaged more in these practices after completing the mentorship program.

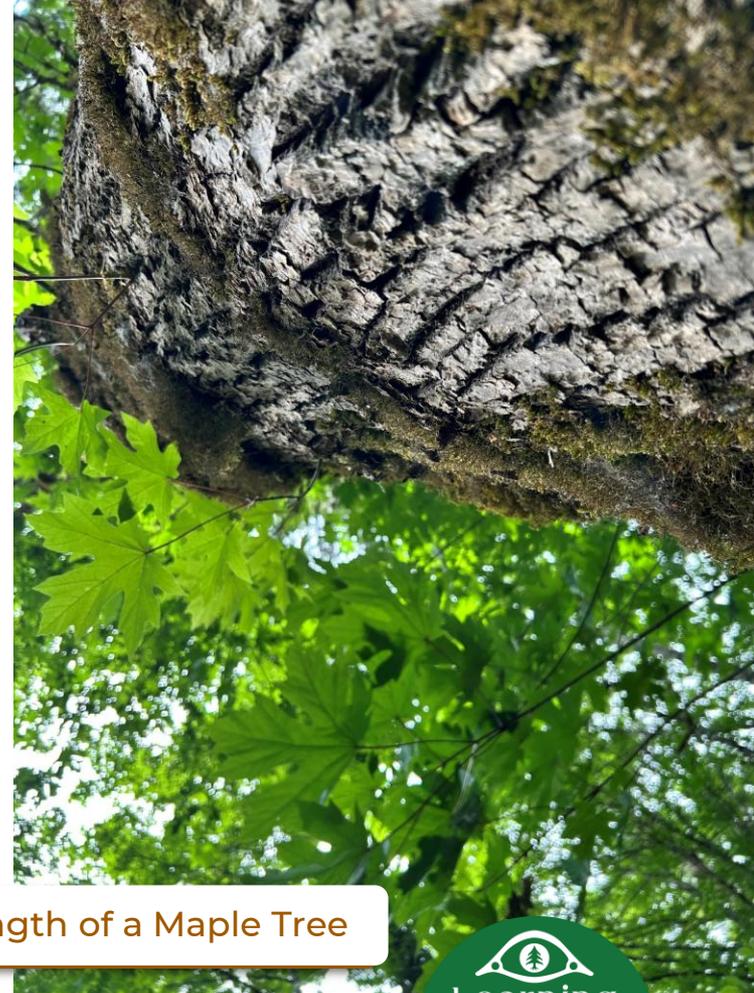
“How LOT Mentoring journey has changed me is I stop and NOTICE now. Through mentoring others to notice, it has reminded me again and again to NOTICE things around me. When I go for a walk I see so much more. It helped me bring back my Lens that I once had as a child.” – LOT Mentor

Slowing Down and Seeing Things
Through my Childhood Lens



Demonstrate how your mentorship journey has changed as a result of LOT

*“This photo represents my change in mentorship journey as a result of LOT. This tree is massive and has provided so much in the 51 years my centre has been open. It serves as a daily reminder of what nature provides each day in mentorship. My journey has taught me to **slow down and look**, this tree is **constantly evolving**, growing new life, limbs and sub-trees off of its trunk. It represents the **strong roots** I am building and the new life I am mentoring. It was recently discovered through a mentorship discussion that this tree has been a focus of programs long before me. It still holds a maple syrup tap from 20 years ago as people before me used its gift to teach the children.” – LOT Mentor*



Strength of a Maple Tree

Framing Question

#3

Showcase Mentorship Grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-Eyed Seeing, as described by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, is a core principle of the LOT program. The program – including the mentorship component – aims to integrate learnings from Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, alongside Western knowledge and ways of learning. Photovoice participants reflected on key elements of LOT mentorship that demonstrated the value of a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, including honouring lived experience, embracing multiple perspectives, and encouraging presence in the current moment. In this section, we explore these themes.

Photovoice participants described LOT mentorship as **honouring storytelling, traditional wisdom, and lived experience**. By combining hierarchical Western mentorship approaches with more circular Indigenous approaches, LOT encourages inter-generational learning that helps to respect the past and keep stories alive.

Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

A Totem of Self Discovery

*"It's really important to me to get to know the children at the start of each year. Getting to understand them as individuals and how they see themselves takes time and effort, and it is important to me to celebrate each of them and their unique personality. Introducing Indigenous totem animals and each animal's attributes helped me teach the children another culture's way of seeing oneself. Two-Eyed Seeing is a guiding principle that encourages learning from both Indigenous and Western perspectives. Taking strengths from each culture, I wove two ways of using personality traits to describe who we are, and the resulting choices each student made to select their Totem Animal was an experience I will never forget. I made sure to honour each child and their uniqueness by showcasing our collective Totem Pole in the classroom for the entire school year. I am so grateful to live in [a city where I am] surrounded by "a melting pot" of cultures. Many of the Early Childhood Educators in my group were new immigrants at the start of their learning about Indigenous cultures. Just as **Two-Eyed Seeing is a unique perspective that can offer insights from both Indigenous and Western ways within the classroom and outside**; the participants in my cohort shared how they interpreted "Canadian" cultures and experiences by integrating them with their own." – LOT Mentor*



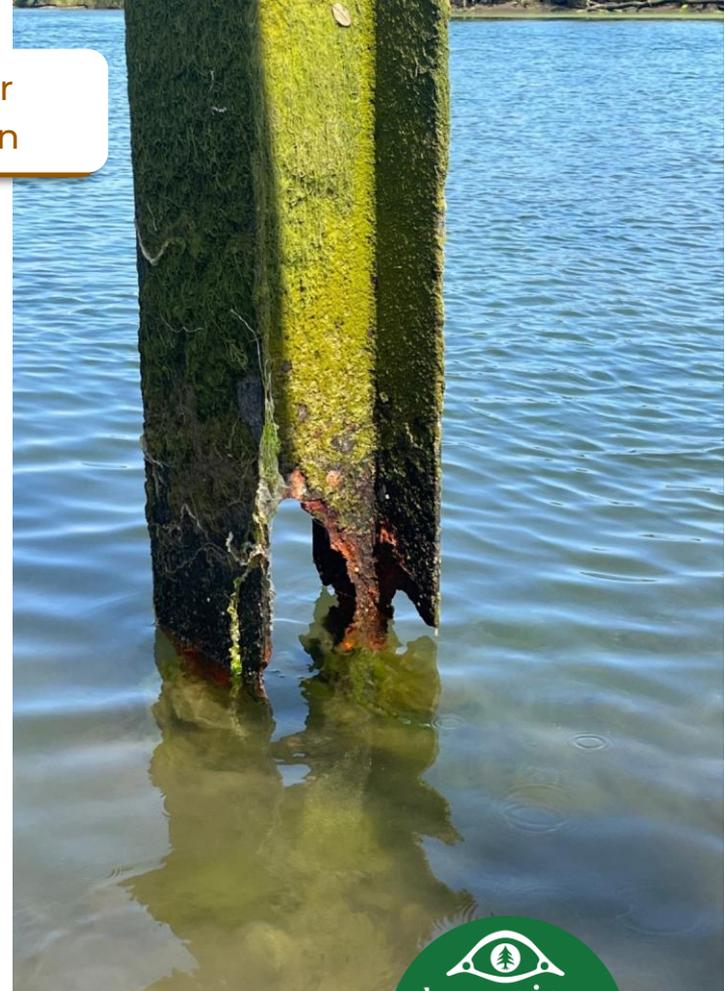
Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

Where the River Meets the Ocean

*"[The message I want to share is the importance of] breaking down barriers and old ways of thinking and being. During my LOT mentorship I share my thoughts, curiosities, and reflections alongside the participants. This photo feels like it has great symbolism. This area is sacred to the Snuneymuxw First Nations. The great powerful laws of nature show themselves here throughout the year with spawning salmon, a protected area for birds as well as being open to the public where everyone in the community can enjoy this space. This area was not always viewed this way. Back in the coal days of Nanaimo this space was used to load coal onto ships. There are steel posts like the one in the photo, some still standing, eroding slowly while others have crumbled under the water. The area is littered with concrete chunks, scrap metal and a massive steel spool which would have had a thick, steel cable on it at one time. This stark contrast keeps this place interesting, wondering what it might have been like at its peak output. Although we may feel disheartened by the 'junk' left behind it tells a story and the story leads to our present. After all that industry the land has gone back to the birds, animals, fish, and community members that love it so. **The LOT program is taking pieces of our past and present and molding it into a new future where there is space for everyone.**" – LOT Mentor*

One Photovoice participant described why such relational and land-based experiences grounded in traditional wisdom were so impactful:

"There's so many things out there that we don't necessarily want to think about anymore, but they're part of the history, whether the history is bad or good. If you take everything away, you've erased the knowledge and you've erased the ability to learn from past mistakes. That piece meant a lot to me."



Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

Learn Outside. Outside the Box.



“Learning is a sacred process. Traditionally skills were taught in the context of an activity or experience, and these require time to reflect as well. Elders and knowledge keepers are important resources but these moments can occur with educators anywhere from the forest to the play yard garden or a city sidewalk on the way to a public park. We combine the resources we have with a cultural perspective.”

– LOT Mentor

In this photo, the mentor described a common practice in their centre in which children are involved in all stages of harvesting berries – they grow berries in their garden bed or explore spaces where wild berries grow, and they learn which berries can be picked. Together, they harvest, make jam, and gift the jam to Elders. This lesson starts with an understanding of “when can I pick the berry?” and grows into a practice that honours the traditional gifts of the land and local communities. Describing the blueberries pictured, the mentor noted:

“clearly to us [adults] they’re not ready. But, a typical three year old might want to give it a try. And so I just really wanted to hone in on something seemingly simple that can just be looked at in an entirely different perspective [in this photo].”

Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

In addition to honoring traditional practices, LOT mentorship invites mentors to **see the world from multiple perspectives**. By embracing numerous ways of knowing, mentors described accessing more knowledge and joy than taking a singular perspective. For example, one participant described gaining a new appreciation for a common weed when they learned about traditional uses for the plant. Similar to seeing the world through the eyes of a child, Two-Eyed Seeing helped them embrace the multiple perspectives already present within themselves and within their local communities.

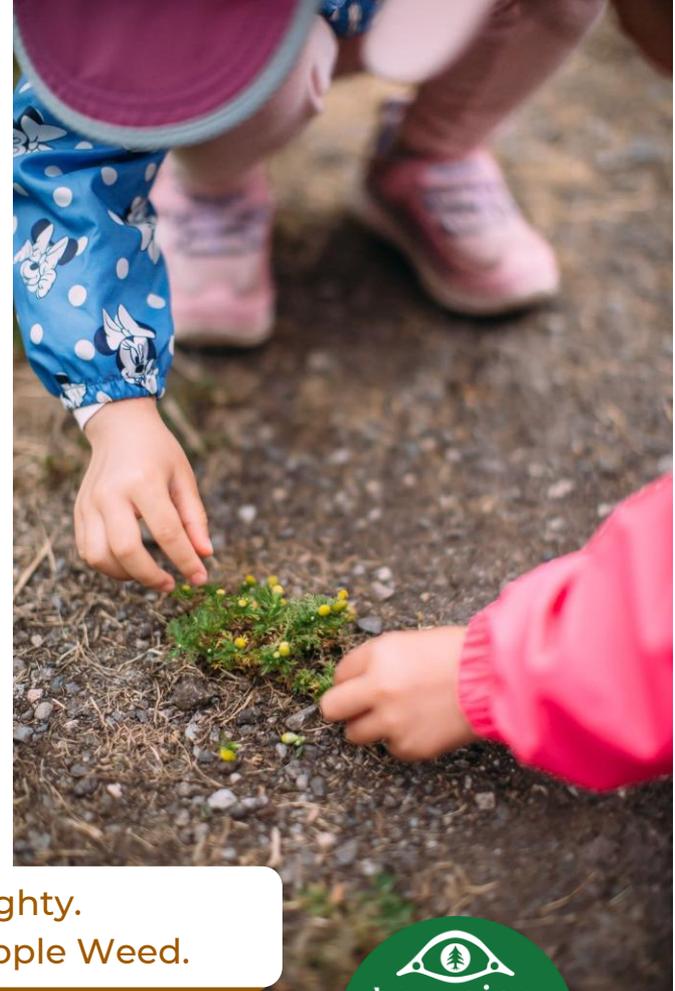


Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

*“From my mentorship experience both as a mentee and mentor, **I learned to look at things from many perspectives.** I’m a student; I’m a teacher. I’m young; I’m old. I’m wise; I’m foolish. I walk on Mother Earth and feel humbled to share everything I have with you.*

What I like to share in this specific picture is something that is simple yet brings abundant joy. This is pineapple weed and the students are rubbing their fingers on the flowers to extract the scent that resembles pineapple. Did you know that this plant has been used by Indigenous People of North America and Northeast Asia for thousands of years? Not only can it be brewed as tea to help with sleep, it can also be eaten to boost energy, grown as insect repellent, used for pain relief, and extraction and anti-oxidant properties aid skin health, boost immunity, and speed up healing (<https://www.organicfacts.net/health-benefits/herbs-and-spices>).

Slow down, crouch down, use eyes first, walk silently...you might start to see things you’ve never noticed before yet they are all around us. Pineapple weed is tough, hardy, and brave because it grows particularly well on poor and compacted ground. We can learn so much from a little plant that people see as weed but is cherished by many others. Thank you, pineapple weed!” – LOT Mentor



Small but Mighty.
I am a Pineapple Weed.

Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

By encouraging mentors to **slow down and be present**, Two-Eyed Seeing enabled moments of self-care and connection that their otherwise busy lives may have caused them to miss. As one participant described:

“[Two-Eyed Seeing] teaches me so many things to remember: to be open to experiences and being a mentor; it also invites me to slow down. These are moments that have connection and joy. I love the fact that Two-Eyed Seeing leaves room for connection not only with others, but with my land, my ancestors, and my own intuition.”



Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing



A Moment of Reconnecting

“While walking through my backyard, I nearly stepped on a beautiful yellow butterfly that was resting on the ground. I called my mom over, and together we spent over half an hour with the butterfly, it climbed trustingly onto my mom’s hand moving from her hand to mine. For me, butterflies are a sign of my late Auntie, who passed over 20 years ago. In that moment, it felt like she was visiting with us, spending time with us and reminding us to slow down, and to be present in this moment.”

*One of the most special things about the LOT mentorship program is how it invites us to slow down, to listen, not just to people, but to land and spirit. That unexpected moment with my mom and the butterfly was so gentle, so full of memory and presence. It reminded me of **the kind of mentorship LOT fosters**. It’s not always formal, it can be spontaneous. It **lives in relationships, in stories, in pauses**. That’s what makes the Learning Outside Together program unique.*

As a LOT mentor, I am reminded how important it is to honour both Indigenous and western ways of knowing, to see through both eyes. This encounter reminded me that land offers moments of mentorship too. Through quiet observation and connection, with my mother and the butterfly, we are taught so many things if we are open to the experience. Being a LOT mentor invites me to slow down, to look, to listen, to make room for connection not just with others, but with the land, ancestors, and intuition. That’s the kind of mentorship that lasts.” – LOT Mentor

Showcase mentorship grounded in Two-Eyed Seeing

In these ways, LOT fosters **informal peer mentorship**. Photovoice participants described approaching mentorship in LOT through a relational lens, such as taking time to reflect on past group meetings and starting each meeting with a personal check-in. Rather than emphasizing formal structure, a Two-Eyed Seeing approach to mentorship encouraged organic conversation, which helped participants feel comfortable and made the meetings more meaningful. In short, it facilitated a reciprocal environment in which mentors and participants learned together.



Framing Question

#4

Show an Example of How a LOT Mentor Helped a Participant or Others Overcome Barriers to Outdoor Play

Although largely focused on skills, knowledge, and confidence of participants, a long-term aim of the LOT program is to improve the quality and quantity of children's land-based experiences. This question was designed to showcase some of the tangible instances of mentorship supporting LOT participants to overcome barriers to outdoor play that many ECEs face. Photovoice participants described many ways in which LOT mentorship positively impacted their work with children and other educators, though we received only one submission for this question³.

In this photo and narrative, the Photovoice participant reflected on LOT group discussions about barriers to outdoor play. The participating mentor described LOT participants sharing about challenges promoting the importance of outdoor play in their workplace and difficulties connecting with nature in the city. As a group, they **discussed how to explore and overcome barriers**. One group member mentioned the Pacific Northwest Plant Knowledge Cards⁴, which they had learned about from another educator. These cards explain how to identify plants, what they're used for, and where to find them. The participating mentor described how the cards represented a concrete resource that helped ECEs feel more confident facilitating children's outdoor experiences:

"I put [the resource cards I learned about in LOT] in my daycare every day. If we go out for a walk, I just grab a [deck] and then ask the children to find any trees, any plants around our neighbourhood."

³This may be due to examples being indirect, long-term outcomes; mentors not having access to participants' workplaces; and/or it being difficult to photograph examples that don't include children, who Photovoice participants were requested to not include due to privacy concerns. However, these reasons are speculative as we unfortunately did not have time in the discussion to validate these.

⁴<https://www.strongnations.com/store/7484/pacific-northwest-plant-knowledge-cards>

Show an example of how a LOT mentor helped a participant or others overcome barriers to outdoor play

"[The message I want to share about this photo is] building connection with nature! Not all childcare programs have access to nearby forests/parks and for some centres, the outdoor playground is the only outdoor space. This can make it challenging for the educators who want to offer meaningful outdoor experiences. We have discussed and explored how to overcome this barrier while many of us already use natural materials like sticks, pinecones, leaves and flowers for activities. Also, we shared our concerns about our limited knowledge of plants. To support this, one resource our group identified was the "Pacific Northwest Plant Knowledge" cards. These cards encourage us to explore nature and give information. By sharing this resource, not only did it help increase our confidence, but also we become co-learners with the children." – LOT Mentor

Other examples of how LOT mentorship improved workplace outdoor play pedagogy included facilitating mentor experiences with ECE practicum students (The Journey of a Bug House, slide 35), embracing the land as a teacher by adopting a Two-Eyed Seeing approach (A Totem of Self Discovery, slide 24), internalizing the value of going outdoors and being present into their own lives (Take a Moment, slide 15), and generally sharing resources or networking in a way that is often unavailable to busy ECEs.



"Cottonwood" – I Found You!

Framing Question

#5

Share a Message About the Importance of Mentorship for ECEs with Decision-Makers (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

The final framing question invites Photovoice participants to speak directly to decision-makers in their own voices on issues that matter to them. A goal of Photovoice is to help decision-makers understand the impact and consequences of their actions or inactions on the people who are affected by the policies, programs, and practices they manage.

Participating mentors described recruitment and retention challenges within early childhood education in BC, identifying improved retention as one important outcome of mentorship. Photovoice participants described how quality mentorship experiences are essential for ECE practicum students and enrich the work of ECEs. New professionals can easily get overlooked in such a demanding and busy workplace; **LOT mentorship extends beyond the LOT program and into mentors' workplaces**, positively influencing their colleagues and the children in their care.

Share a message about the importance of mentorship for ECEs with decision-makers (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

"This is a home for bugs made by my practicum student and the toddlers at work. It shows the value of mentorship and progression of mentoring our peers. My student progressed under my leadership over 6 months from an eager student to a skilled professional with amazing nature-based projects and provocations. Children who rarely engaged in group activities eagerly found materials and ideas to add to this bug house. They watch this house to see what types of bugs live in different materials every day." – LOT Mentor

During this workplace mentorship discussion, one participant noted:

"If we all give new learners that sort of space, what an amazing field this will keep on being."



The Journey of a Bug House

Share a message about the importance of mentorship for ECEs with decision-makers (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

Additionally, as mentioned previously, the reciprocal nature of mentorship enhances outcomes for both mentees and mentors. Photovoice participants commented on how it improves workplace culture, cultivates joy, and helps shift personal mindsets to be more positive. They shared wishes for system-level changes in ECE training and education, expressing the value of both LOT program content and mentorship being available within certification programs:

"I really wish this LOT program can actually be shared or be made available to every ECE that [is] getting certified. And I think when conversations are shared and people are listened to, it's not just the students we work with [that benefit]; we make everything better."



Share a message about the importance of mentorship for ECEs with decision-makers (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

What Outdoors Has Taught Me

"I chose this photo for its endless possibilities. What are we looking at? Is it a photo, a painting, a frame, or something from nothing? Who took the picture? What time of the day is it? If I don't tell you, do you know that this was taken in the heart of a busy city? I like the way my head works when I study this image.

***What if we spend some time every day, lying with children in nature, and just look up in silence? What benefit will it bring? Our body and heart will be filled with simple happiness.** Yes, simplicity of life when we are with children, when we have our moments of sharing. This is the message I want to deliver in our journey of mentorship.*

Close your eyes; open your heart, and let the wind take you away.

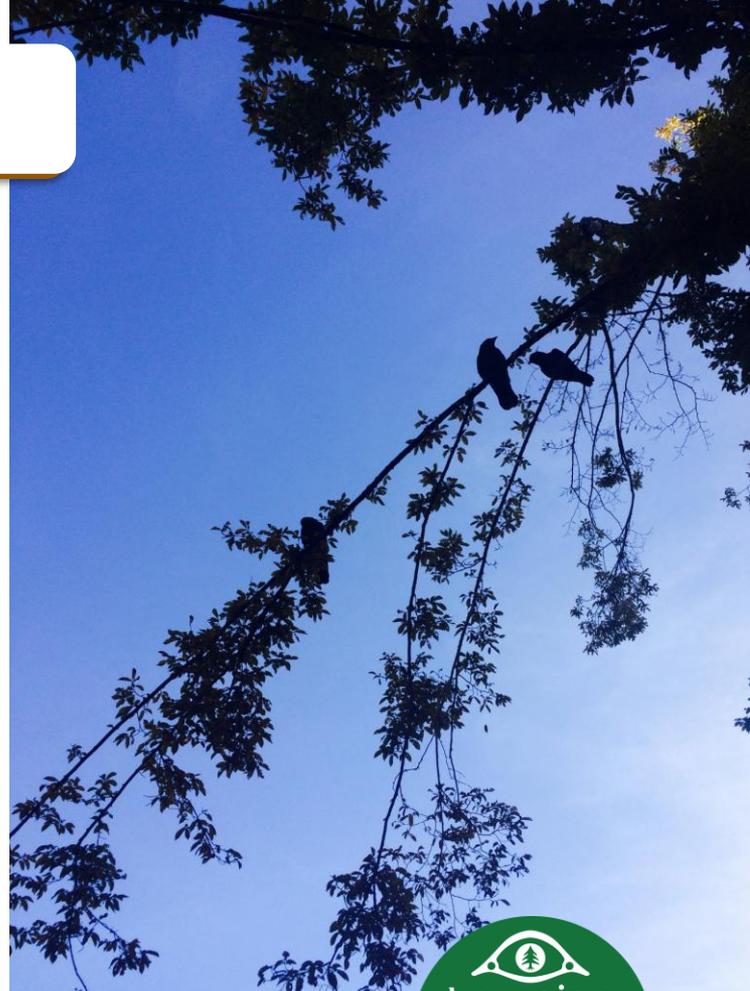
Let us travel to a place where we have long forgotten.

It is not far away; it is always there.

It is your inner child.

The child is blossoming." – LOT Mentor

Finally, Photovoice participants advocated for the importance of the outdoors and the value of **trusting, relational approaches to ECE and mentorship**, in which educators are afforded the autonomy and agency to determine their own best interests. Rather than more colonial, rigid approaches to professional development, peer mentorship that embraces a person-first focus was seen as especially valuable in letting the discussion "go where it needs to go", acknowledging the realities and challenges that exist within ECE.



Share a message about the importance of mentorship for ECEs with decision-makers (e.g., policy-makers, funders, community)

Time for Some Fun and Frolicking

“On what was to be a long drive to go to my niece’s grade 7 graduation, we had just finished up at a rest stop and even though it was a beautiful sunny day we knew we needed to get back on the road. As we drove out of the parking lot, we were still a little ways from the on ramp. We saw a bunch of people in a field and there was movement all over the ground...small brown creatures...what we thought to be Prairie Dogs but later realized is called a Columbian Ground Squirrel. They were darting around people in and around their feet. Even though we were in a rush we pulled over to the side of the road and got out to investigate.

Watching the Ground Squirrels frolic through the grass brought so much joy. My daughter, who is 26, and mom were both laughing beside me, all of us trying to capture a decent photo. Every time we thought one of them was standing still near us, it would take off in a blur. They were so fast, playful and curious, occasionally touching our feet, legs hoping for a treat.

*ECEs need a support system that nurtures their hearts as much as their practice. Being a part of Learning Outside Together reminds me that mentorship doesn’t have to look like meetings or checklists, it can be as simple and meaningful as a moment outdoors, shared laughter, or quiet reflection. Watching the ground squirrels dash in and out of the grass as my family laughed beside me was a vivid reminder of how **play, joy, and presence are at the core of good teaching and good mentoring.** **When there are fully funded programs like LOT, you fund more than professional growth. You support caring for mental health, wholeness and joy for educators who give so much of themselves every day.***

One of the most powerful lessons I received as a LOT mentor was: Just step outside...even if it’s only for five minutes. That mindset shift can change everything. We were on a tight schedule that day, already back in the car when we noticed the field full of ground squirrels. Normally, I might have kept driving, we were all tired as we had already been in the car for about 2 hours, we took a vote if we should get out of the car to look...and it’s one of those times where you can tell everyone wants to say yes and have fun...but we all were trying to be “grown up” and make the better choice to keep driving. But the moment that we decided to get out of the car, we stepped out and let the moment lead. Laughing with my daughter and mom as the squirrels teased us. As they began posing and then disappearing right as we tried over and over again to take a cute photo. It reminded me that outdoor play doesn’t need structure. It needs openness, humour, and curiosity.

Just like mentorship!” – LOT Mentor



Conclusion

Overall, participating mentors described being passionate about their role in the LOT program and felt that they had gained personal and professional value from their participation in the mentorship program. Photovoice participants highlighted the value of being able to experience the LOT program and its content again from a different perspective, as well as with new groups of ECEs. Additionally, networking and sharing resources with other ECEs was described as an important program outcome, noting that such opportunities were not available in their workplaces.

Participating mentors emphasized the importance of viewing participants as equal peers who were sharing their learning journey with the mentors. Rather than taking an authoritative position in participants' learning, mentors viewed their role as supportive and collaborative, which they attributed to a positive learning environment for participants and mentors alike. This peer-centered approach to learning was informed by principles of Two-Eyed Seeing, in which the importance of perspective-taking and lived experiences are emphasized. Photovoice participants agreed that taking a reflective approach to mentorship (e.g., slowing down, taking time for oneself, leaving room for new perspectives) was an important skill that was developed through the mentorship program and one that they find deeply meaningful to everyday life.

Conclusion

Photovoice participants described how this long-term, relational approach to mentorship and professional development helps ECEs to learn from and build on what has come before them. Having the option to move from LOT participant to mentor (potentially across multiple cohorts), to mentor-facilitator within a supportive learning environment builds confidence and supports behaviour change:

*“[You mentor] the first time and you're super nervous and you're experiencing everything for the first time...but then you come back to it or you grow with it. By the end of the whole journey, you're so much more involved and you're so much more excited about the journey that you've taken. And then, you know, **you just get to keep building on that.**”*

Photovoice participants expressed gratitude that LOT is free for participants and a strong desire for it to continue as a meaningful and impactful shared learning experience for educators across BC.

