

Playing to Learn in Canada and Jamaica

Susan Ramsay, Early Literacy Specialist, Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox & Addington, 613-354-6318 (ext 32)

“He’s just playing.” *Just playing?* What looks like “just playing” to adults is how children engage in scientific discovery while digging in the garden; learn about time and velocity while playing tag or racing toy cars; experiment with concepts like gravity and volume while playing with water during bath time. Children learn social and communication skills while pretending to be super heroes and bus drivers. They learn to distinguish rhyme and the sounds of language necessary for learning how to read and write while singing playful songs like “Down by the Bay”.

Play is so foundational to children’s learning, that it is embraced by the Ministry of Education in their full day learning programs. *Early Learning for Every Child Today* is the play-based teaching framework being implemented in child care programs across the province. Play is no longer considered frivolous. Through play, children have concrete, meaningful and fun ways of understanding their world.

The importance of play is catching on at home and abroad. From May 14-22, I, along with 14 other educators and students, will be traveling to Kingston Jamaica to share our experiences of working with young children. In preparation for this trip through Students Crossing Borders, the Jamaican teachers were asked what they would like from their Canadian visitors. They requested a focus on how to teach using play-based curriculum. They also requested a family literacy event and support to create a parenting centre for families.

Education in Jamaica, as everywhere, is foundational to economic, political, and social health, but financial resources and educational materials in Jamaica are scarce. Students Crossing Borders began working with the Jamaican people in 1991 and have developed a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

In 2009, with fund-raised dollars, Students Crossing Borders filled a shipping container with early childhood furniture and building supplies and shipped it to Kingston Jamaica. The shipping container was placed in a high needs area of the city. Windows, doors, and outdoor space were added to the shipping container, transforming it into a developmental play centre for young children. In an area of the world where poverty, AIDS and orphaned children are prevalent, there is great need. There is also great opportunity for those with resources to help.

We care about our children. We care about them within our families, in our home communities, and in our world.

Anyone can be a part of supporting this international project by visiting the Student Crossing Borders website at www.studentscrossingborders.ca to learn more. Specific donations of medical and first aid supplies are needed and in short supply. Educational supplies, such as markers, paper, literacy and numeracy games for young children, new children’s and parenting books are also a priority for this trip. Financial donations will go to the establishment of a parenting centre in Jamaica. (Tax receipts are issued for donations of \$50 or more.)

To donate or to find out more, please contact me at sramsay@klandskills.ca.

Shipping container with building and school supplies arrives in Kingston, Jamaica from Students Crossing Borders in Canada in 2009.



Shipping container is transformed into play centre for young children.



Construction is complete. Outside view of developmental play centre:



Inside view of play centre for children in Kingston, Jamaica:

