Co-Construct Literate Identities

WHAT’S INVOLVED IN LEARNING

- Creating texts reflective of family, local, and global literacies
- Learning various local literacy practices within a range of communities
- Learning the uniqueness and similarities of their family’s literacies and those of others

Nanny, mommy, poppa, and Lily participating in Run For the Cure in Nova Scotia, Fall 2009.

Lily and her family support this fundraiser yearly in honor of Lily’s Aunt Kelly, a cancer survivor.

~ Maria Gillis
Unicorn Children’s Center Inc.

“There’s Daddy. There’s Brooke. We need a bus ticket. The cars are red. This is the road.” Brooke said as she drew her Daddy and herself traveling to Unicorn Children’s Centre by bus.

~ Maria Gillis
Unicorn Children’s Center Inc.

Many questions about bugs inspired a visit from an entomologist. His passionate presentation about bugs along with some important props transformed our dramatic play centre into a bug laboratory.

~ Gail Fournier
Millidge Avenue Tot Spot Childcare

The language, practices and symbols of Animal Hospitals...
What are your families’ literacy practices?  
At “Next to Mom Day Care Center”…

- A dad who is a sous-chef invited the children to make their own pizzas;
- A mom and dad taught the tango during a music project;
- A mom shared her career as a paramedic and left paramedic supplies for the children;
- A mom shared her talents as a cake decorator on special days;
- A dad who is a carpenter helped children construct picture frames.

What are your families’ passions, interests, hobbies, ways of celebrating...

Like many educators, Amy and her husband share their home interests with children. In this care they brought in an abandoned nest and a trunk gnawed by beavers.

~ Amy Savoy  Chatham Day Centre Inc. Too

I am motivated by the creativity and imaginative ideas that are born each day in our art centre! Most materials are recyclables complimented by necessities like glue, tape, and mark-making tools.

With the accumulation of master-pieces, I thought, “What better way to share them than an Art Show!” So I invited families to a potluck and art gallery premiere on Friday at 5 pm.

We all voted to pitch in on pizza and it was a success! We had a ten minute slide show of children’s pictures from September to now and each child had a wall space “Featuring..... so-and-so!”

Every family was present and expressed sincere thanks for the family time and the chance to get to know other families too!

I provided t-shirts and fabric paint so each child and their family could design t-shirts.

A great success overall and well worth the work and extra time! I plan on hosting an event at least quarterly to show the parents how important community is in my daycare!

~ Cassandra St. Louis  Precious Gems Play Centre
Co-Construct Literate Identities

Community Inspires Circus Curriculum

As we walked down Water Street in St Andrews, I witnessed the children's excitement as they stopped to watch a Juggler. Noticing the children's absorbed attention and delight in the Juggler's performance, I experienced an A-Ha moment. This unpredicted event could inspire a circus project. I decided to invite Eric to our centre to share his circus passions with the children.

Eric showing children how to contort their bodies.

Learning to do cartwheels and flips.

Eric teaching us how to juggle.

Our ticket booth

Creating clown puppets

Serving food

Our concession stand
As Early Childhood Educators, the compassion, dedication, and joy in our profession has multiplied through the new Curriculum Framework. My mind and heart were always set on program planning through themes until the excitement arose in my three-year-old children while on a routine neighbourhood walk. Seeing how this local juggler inspired a month long circus curriculum was my “A-Ha” moment.

I now trust that through careful observation, determination and getting to know my children better, our curriculum will unfold before us. Though there are many challenges, the excitement of the children telling me what they want to learn is exhilarating.

~ Angela Little  Passamaquoddy Children’s Centre Inc
**Co-Construct Literate Identities**

**Making a Christmas Wreath.**

On Monday we went outside our play fence to explore fir trees with the children. We explained that you can use the fir tips to make a wreath. We described how to snap the tips off the tree showing that the tips should be approximately 1 - 1½ feet long. The children collected many tips and put them in our shed. We explained that we had to leave the tips in the cold or they would dry out and all the spills would fall off. Then we showed them what spills were.

On Tuesday we brought the tips inside, placing them on a newspaper covered table. I showed the other wreath making supplies: a ring and wire. Demonstrating how to break the tips, I placed them on the wreath ring, holding them in place by winding the wire around them. The children took turns winding the tips onto the ring until our wreath was finished.

On Wednesday we decorated our wreath. I showed the children how to attach the decorations with the extra wreath wire. The children finished our wreath with a big red bow. Thursday we hung our wreath on the front door. The children were all excited to tell their parents who were equally thrilled to see their children's wreath.

*Did you know? New Brunswick is the largest wreath-manufacturing province in Canada!*

**Why this matters:**

Together we explored local wreath making in the context of the children’s day care. The children are introduced to the language of wreath making - fur tips and spills, the characteristics of a fir tree and the process of constructing a wreath. Wreath makers in the community continue to contribute to our centre by saving the wire spools for our children to explore in other ways.

~ Christina Shaw, Jennifer Janes, Stephanie Kelson  Pennfield Daycare
**Adventureland Daycare and the Library**

Your centre goes to the library regularly — can you talk about what is involved in taking the children to the library?

Every Tuesday twenty-two children and three educators take a forty-minute walk to the public library. The three and four year old children walk together holding hands while the educators hold the hands of the two-year-old children. Sometimes we borrow a red wagon for them because it is a long walk. Our walk takes us on less heavily traveled roads — on the trail to Sobey's, up Carleton Street and through the graveyard. The children always recognize the Sobey sign. Once we reach the graveyard, they know we are almost there.

When we arrive we usually meet children from other childcare centres. We browse through board books, listen to the librarian read and sing some songs together. Then I take the children up the picture book aisles where they can choose two or three books to take back to the centre for the week.

**What happens with the books when you return? How do you decide what to read?**

Back at the centre, the library books are placed in a library bin. In the morning the helper of the day chooses two stories that will be read. This works well because I have five children and there are five days in a week. Everyone gets his or her turn! In the afternoon, I get to choose the story. It takes fifteen to twenty minutes to read the stories. Children spend time with books on their own and each other. We have bookshelves in every room and we read throughout the building at different times of the day.

Before I read with the children, I read the book myself — as much as I can — to get an idea of the story and of the expression and tone to use when I read aloud. Sometimes we do follow-up that is spontaneous and/or planned. For example, when I read The Twelve Hats of Tara, making a hat with material was spontaneous. Another time when we read Bubble, Bubble by Mercer Mayer I planned for a bubble table so that the children could make their own bubbles.

**What do you notice about how children interact with the books?**

The fours tend to retell the stories and they use the same expression and tone that I use. The threes look at the pictures. They love to read The Monster at the End of this Book: Staring Loveable, Furry Old Grover by Jon Stone. Over time they memorized the whole book. We have started the Scholastic books program and the parents pick out books for home. There are also lots of chances for the centre to buy books.

~ Cara Thiessen Victoria Street Adventureland Daycare

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**For Reflection**

Become knowledgeable about the artistic and cultural life of your children, their families, your community, and beyond. Think about your own participation in events and communities — do you convey your excitement and interest to the children and build upon theirs?

Think about how you recognize children as readers, writers, musicians, artists, performers, and mathematicians in their own right in their daily lives. Documenting with photographs and drawings is a way of showing that children’s representations are taken seriously while honouring the many identities of children and their families.
Re-invent Popular Culture

**What’s involved in learning**
- Transporting and transforming the literacies of popular culture from home into the centre
- Exploring various identities and characters embedded in popular culture
- Growing in their capacity to ask critical questions about stereotypes represented in popular culture

**Pretending to be Other People, Animals, or Destructive Monsters**
allows children the opportunity to explore identities, complex ethical situations and other perspectives.

By authoring understandings and identities children can explore themes that might preoccupy and disturb them even if they have not encountered them in everyday reality: birth, death, hatred, anger, love, injury, war, violence, fear, being left alone, good and bad,…

In play we can start and stop it. Everyone playing needs to be emotionally and physically safe so remind children that when someone says “no” they need to stop.

When safety is established children can think and feel deeply about imagined events that would be more violent, traumatic and horrific in real life.

Edmiston (2008)

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**Learning the ‘Hoe-Down Throw-Down’.**
Hannah Montana has been playing a huge role in our room. With her new movie out, the Hoe-Down Throw-Down has become very popular. Laura and Emma took great pride in displaying the moves to this dance. The girls used teamwork to execute how things would happen. They displayed a huge amount of respect for themselves and others as they involved everyone.

~ Aimee Olsen
Beary Special Daycare Inc.

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**Television**
oral rhymes jokes raps radio stickers cards jewellery clothes artifacts for role play games comics books cell phones computers video
When children bring in their cherished toys we can see it as an opportunity to take children’s theories, hypotheses, dreams, and fantasies seriously, instead of seeming not to have heard anything or telling children that they should not talk about these things.

Dahlberg Cited in Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (1999, 52)

As an adult player be ready to co-create imaginary worlds in blocks, paints, sand, water, gesture and performance. Be ready to explore possible selves, invented worlds and what if... scenarios.

Respecting and learning about children’s knowledge, experiences and ideas can be balanced with counter-images that challenge cultural stereotypes such as “Yes, girls can be pirates ... or hockey players”

Popular culture can inform the literacy curriculum of early years settings when educators recognize and build upon children’s popular cultural pursuits.

Re-invent Popular Culture

Keertan’s Superheroes.

The blue and red one is Spiderman.
The Blue one is a Power Ranger.
The green one is the Incredible Hulk.
The black one is Batman.
The yellow one is Superman and
the yellow one with claws is Wolverine.
The orange one is Johnny with Fire.

~ Jill Shaw  Centreville Child Care

“I’m a Figure Skater!”

When Gabrielle arrives each morning we never know if she is Gabrielle, Dorothy, Lisa, Barbie Princess, Gossamer Fairy, or Alisa. This morning she arrived dressed as a Figure skater. She told me she needed to make figure skates. She cut the paper into four pieces, put one piece under her foot, one on each side and a strap over the top. She taped them all together around her foot. As she was doing this she looked at me and said, “China won the gold.” She then made her second skate, stood in front of me and said, “Look, I’m a figure skater.”

Later, that morning, Gabrielle decided to write a play about a figure skater. It was called, “The Figure Skaters at the Olympics.” She went around the class asking who wanted to be in her play. She needed two figure skaters, three hockey players, a dog, and a cat. During our story time the children performed Gabrielle’s play.

Gabrielle had been talking about the Olympics all week. Drawing from the media coverage of the Olympics, Gabrielle chooses her clothing, creates paper skates and authors a play for her and her friends to perform. We will continue to support Gabrielle’s desire to write plays, create props and perform them during group time.

~ Tonya White  UNB Children’s Centre

“Transformers”

One afternoon you both were playing and I overheard you saying, “Transformers! I’ll save you!” As I listened on, your imaginations grew. “Chich, chich, chich, chooch, chew.” “What was that?” I asked. “I was changing into a cat,” replied Daniel.
“Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

Gabrielle, you surprised us when you arrived disguised as Dorothy from ‘The Wizard of Oz’! From your ruby slippers, to Toto in a basket, to the perfect braids, you looked just like Dorothy and even signed in as her. When I asked you if you wanted to write the play about your character you didn’t hesitate for a moment. You dictated the whole story to me from the part where you sing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” to your chant of; “There’s no place like home.”

Soon other children wanted to be a part of your play. You were busy, with the clipboard in one hand and Toto in his basket, in signing up children for parts in the play, helping decide costumes and locating a yellow brick road.

Paige knew she wanted to be a witch. When she heard that there was a good and a bad witch she decided to be the good one. Ava asked to be the bad witch. Paige made a witch’s hat but couldn’t decide how to make it stay on her head. I suggested a band to staple it on similar to our birthday crowns and she decided to use a birthday crown instead. The beautiful yellow dress that she found in the dress up clothes was a perfect costume. Ava wanted a mask. She drew a face on black paper that was quite scary. Tonya helped her cut out eyeholes and put pipe cleaners on the sides to hold it onto her head.

It was obvious that Spencer was to be the Lion as he loves to play lions. Braedon put his name down as the Tin Man and in the meantime wrote a play of his own about the dog he had brought from home. Trent agreed to be the scarecrow and Jibril, Grace, Alexandra and Tonya were to play Munchkins. You became concerned at one point that you would need a yellow brick road. Luckily Kim noticed the large sheet of painted cardboard in the hallway. You and your friends paraded it around the room until you decided that the play was going to happen on the large steps so the yellow brick road was to be below it.

Before the play was performed you felt it necessary to warn the class about the scary scenes and suggest children could cover their eyes if they get scared. You started the show by descending the stairs and singing your song so beautifully. From then on you acted, directed and organized this amazing performance. You had a definite idea of how the show was to be performed and encouraged each actor to fulfill his or her role in the way you saw it.

There was a moment of worry when the Tin Man, Scarecrow and Lion were to receive their gifts and you remembered that we hadn’t cast anyone as the Wizard. Alexandra stepped up and did a fine job. You ended the show with the line, “There’s no place like home” three times. What a great job!

Why this matters:

Gabrielle brought this powerful story that she knows so well to life in her pretending and performing. She was charismatic in her enthusiasm and attracted many other actors, eager to perform in her play. She was challenged to think of ways to act out her story in the environment. Other children used their imaginations as well to create the costumes they needed.

~ Jill Bateman  UNB Children’s Centre
Re-invent Popular Culture

"This is Mickey. I saw him at Disney. He says hi, but not talking, just with his hand."

"Mickey and Donald. You know what! Mickey is black and white and his shoes are yellow."

Mickey Mouse

During free play you decided you were going to draw Mickey Mouse. Ever since you got back from Disneyland you like to talk about Mickey Mouse a lot. After your first try, you said you could not draw him and you gave up.

The next morning when I came to work Martha showed me a wonderful picture you made of Mickey Mouse. I was so happy that you did not give up. Then you showed me another picture you made of Mickey Mouse. You did a great job, but you still were not happy with it. You did not think it looked much like Mickey Mouse.

Later that afternoon, you decided you wanted to make Mickey again and guess what! After making three pictures of Mickey Mouse you were finally happy with your picture. It had a nice round circle for his face, and two smaller circles for his ears. You did not give up and you kept trying. If you put your mind to it, you can do it.

Why this matters:

- You are learning to extend ideas and take actions using language.
- Developing a sense of appreciation for human creativity and innovation.
- Developing a sense of self.
- Developing a disposition for flexible and fluid thinking.
- Learning to test your limits.
- Developing your fine motor skills.
- Transforming the literacies of popular culture into the centre.

~ Michelle LeBlanc
Little Treasures Child Care / Garderie Petit Trésors

That’s Jane and Michael and the big one is Mary Poppins. Practically perfect in every way! That’s me too.

~ Jackie Deil Springwater Christian Preschool
Ask children and their families about children’s favourite characters from TV, books, videos, video games and comics, and music or sport celebrities. Think about how taking on these different identities informs children’s literate play, and can be extended to other sign systems such as painting or print.

Explore media representations by asking questions that challenge representations, such as, “What toys do you think both boys and girls would like to play with? How come you think that only boys can be Ninjas?”
Use Digital Technologies

**What’s involved in learning**

- Representing their experiences with technologies in everyday life
- Accessing and using digital technologies

**Using digital technologies to make books with children.**

Children may be eager to document their own experiences and perspectives through photos and videos. They are eager to include words they would like to be part of the documentation process.

Including digital tools in play gives children the opportunity to share what they know while they are creating imaginary worlds.

Providing children, families and educators with a camera can be an active, accessible, and flexible way to welcome participation and value creativity.
Andrea used digital technologies to record the children’s millipede project. Transferring the display into a book form allows the educators and children to celebrate a history of their learning while keeping the interest alive for those who have a deep interest in millipedes.

~ Andrea Sobey & Amy Savoy
Chatham Day Care Centre Inc. Too.

S-S-Snakes
Bernadette caught us a couple of snakes which we named Blade and Eel. Checking on line we found out that snakes are reptiles and enjoy eating worms and slugs.

Gabriel checks on his snake friends daily. He enjoys helping to feed them. Gabriel is checking to see if the snakes are done their breakfast.

Checking online we found out about our snakes!
Sussex Early Learning Centre

what events might children, families and educators document?
special trips, family pets, favorite stories, songs, hobbies, treasures...
Use Digital Technologies

Watch This…

Alia used two pieces of paper to create two TV’s for our loft area. Our new small red couch may have inspired her to think about making TVs. She looked for tape and taped the TVs in front of the couch. “One for the children and this one for the adults,” she told me.

Then she had another inspiration and ran back to the art area returning with a ‘clicker’ she had created. She had cleverly used the pack of stickers that were slightly puffy to create realistic buttons on the clicker.

“Now, who likes princesses?” she asked the children playing in the area. “Me,” yelled Swati and Alia answered, “Okay, watch this princess movie.”

Why this matters:

Alia loves artwork and is often inspired to use it in her play. Her handmade TV and clicker fitted in perfectly with the couch in our room and other children were excited by the idea of playing that they were watching TV.

Alia had brought stickers to school for a few days and used them in various ways in her artwork. Today they were perfect as the raised buttons on a remote control. It is interesting that she makes connections between home and school by bringing items that she plans to use with her school projects.

This particular play situation also shows how relevant media experiences are to children today. They have a familiarity with various forms of media and use it with ease in their play. Her great idea could give us a chance to discuss media issues and impressions with this group of children.

~ Jill Bateman  UNB Children’s Centre

“Say Cheese!”

Rachel was playing in the dramatic play centre taking pictures with a prop camera. She was taking pictures of the windows, doors, plants, shelves, etc. Rachel then began taking pictures of children, going from person to person snapping pictures. “Don’t forget to smile!” She would remind them.

Then Rachel gathered some children together to take a group picture. She adjusted each child fixing their hair, and telling them to sit up and to look at the camera. “Say ‘Cheese’ everybody!”.

Rachel really loved snapping pictures, making sure she had everything lined up the way she wanted before taking the picture, paying close attention to every detail before clicking the final picture.

What’s next?

We have been adding more digital prop equipment to explore with technology in the daycare. We understand technology is always a part of home life and we have been adding props to act out home living.

~ Katie Parlee  Sussex Early Learning Centre
By including cell phones, telephones, remote controls and keyboards in the dramatic play centre Mona Eljabi recognizes and values children’s daily experiences with digital technologies.

Mona Eljabi of Next To Mom Day Care Center documents the seasonal changes of a tree outside the daycare. “If I do this two years in a row I wonder what the tree would teach us?”

Educators have hung photos of local landmarks from the children’s community in the block corner. Children’s drawings of these landmarks are hung on the adjacent wall.

Sussex Early Learning Centre
Use Digital Technologies

Stained Snow.

The children were excited to squirt the snow with coloured water. I supplied the children with a range of containers - a few squirted while others sprayed. Some children were so excited by the cause and effect of spraying snow while others took great care: sharing colours, expressing ideas and combining their efforts.

What inspired you to turn the children’s mark making on the snow into a book?

The inspiration for our book was the illustrator Beth Geddes. It was a cold day and after our bottles full of coloured water were empty, many of the children wandered off to play with other things. I had not even thought to take pictures of their snow stains until I saw how important Beth thought they were. She was very sad that the snow would melt, or more snow would come and the snow stains would be gone and no one would know their stories.

Who is the illustrator Beth Geddes? Tell me about how the illustrations were created.

Beth Geddes, the illustrator, is exceptionally shy but very imaginative five-year-old. Furthermore, Beth was moving to Scotland in 8 weeks and was feeling apprehensive about the big change in her life. “I am going to miss my friends and the snow in Canada.” I was also thinking of large “hole” Beth would leave in our class. I thought this would be a nice project for her to share with her new class in Scotland. I also made a copy for our bookshelf.

The process was very easy. I first printed the pictures on regular computer paper and presented them to Beth. I gave her one snow stain at a time. She illustrated it on her own and then told me what she would like to say about it. My original idea was to have her use her own penmanship in the book, but she was hesitant about that. “I want it to look like a real book.” I explained to her that real books look like whatever the author wants, but decided to go with her vision of what it should look like. After she illustrated the snow stains with colouring pencils, I took the illustrated papers and scanned them into my computer and added the text that Beth and I had written together.
How did the children respond to the book? Is there anything else you think I should know?

The children were ECSTATIC about the book. They were very proud of their friend Beth and excited that children in Scotland were going to look at THEIR snow stains. The children take turns choosing our daily reading material and Beth’s book is chosen most days.

I regret not including a picture of Beth somewhere in the book because the children always appreciate seeing what an author looks like. Last year was my prototype and this year I hope to make a larger book with one illustration from each child. I also think it could be a partner project, with one child illustrating and another thinking of the text.

It may seem bizarre that I only worked with one child on this project. The reason I decided to do that is because Beth was moving away shortly, she articulated the vision for the project, and she worked independently on it.


For Reflection

What new technologies are available for use in your centre? How is this technology used to document children’s learning, as a way to communicate thinking, interests, and growth between home and the centre? How is documentation used for planning? Think about how you engage children in rereading documentation.

How do educators, families and children use technologies in and beyond the centre? Think about access to a range of cultural experiences and digital technologies.
Works Cited


Upitis, Rena. 1990. *This Too is Music*. Heinemann Educational Books: Portsmouth, NH.

Professional Resources


What other book genres can we explore? How do they work?

Fairy tales, number books, folk tales, poetry books, song books, trickster stories....

What separates a good book from a bad book is often the reader. My favorite books are clever and gentle with beautiful, simple illustrations. They leave room for imagination, encourage discussion and use new and unlikely words. It's fascinating to see the books that the children are drawn to and interesting to hear what they like about certain books.

I think the main thing when reading to children is to make sure the books are varied in style, age, and subject matter. On our bookshelf, there are less than 50 books that are changed monthly to include seasonal books, books with real pictures, information books, books with beautiful art work, and reference books.

Amanda Raybould
Moncton Montessori School

Alphabet Books
Read and re-read alphabet books to:
• take pleasure in reading
• examine the names and shapes of letters
• point and name objects
• investigate information about one topic
• engage with an artistic style
• solve puzzles
• explore rhymes, new vocabulary and alliteration
• discover the world - locally and globally
• encounter languages in bilingual and multilingual versions

Kinds of Alphabet books:

Word-picture: one clear picture per letter - often with unusual choices.
  - John Burningham’s ABC by John Burningham
  - A, B See! by Tana Hoban
  - Animal Alphabet by Bert Kitchen

Simple narratives: rhyming or poetic text.
  - Alphabet Under Construction by Denise Fleming
  - On Market Street by Arnold & Anita Lobel
  - Eating the Alphabet by Lois Ehlert

Riddles and puzzles: pages invite the children to find objects on the page, or predict what will appear on the next page.
  - The Z was Zapped by Chris Van Allsburg
  - A is for Salad by Mike Lester

Theme or topic:
  - A Farmer’s Alphabet by Mary Azarian
  - Old Black Fly by Jim Aylesworth & Stephen Gammell
  - Eating the Alphabet by Lois Ehlert
Inclusiveness and Equity          Compassion and Caring • Living Democratically • Individuality                     And Independence • Social Responsibility • Communication        • Imagination, Creativity & Play • Spirituality • Zest for Living And Learning • Inclusiveness And Independence • Social