Sense of Self

What's involved in learning

- Developing recognition of self
- Co-constructing their identities
- Experiencing growing self-confidence, self-respect, and ability to take initiative
- Growing in their capacity to express feelings, concerns, and needs
- Pursuing interests, passions, and strengths
- Being curious and questioning
- Persevering and persisting

Children construct self-knowledge from the input they get from others. Children regard the way people react to them as mirrors that reflect who they are. They don't know that mirrors can be distorted. They take in reflected images as truth.

Janet Gonzalez-Mena (2008, 434)

Are children's works on the walls?
Are children's names displayed? Where?
Are children's creations and words positioned at their eye level?
Have children written and illustrated their own books?

How can you encourage children to share their interests, passions, and strengths?

Make interests, passions, and strengths visible by:

- Saying • “Susan, you love horses... can you tell us what a baby horse is called?”
- Displaying • “Bobby, thank you for bringing in your collection of dinky cars.”
- Advocating • “I bet Sam could help you tie your shoelaces.”

See Me:
Watch my facial and body expressions.

Hear Me:
Listen to my theories, ideas, and questions.

Support Me:
Pay attention to my concerns; be nearby, just in case.

Encourage Me:
Promote self-initiative with supportive words.

Believe Me:
I can do it!
Books to read together

- Go Away, Big Green Monster by Edward Emberley
- Can’t You Sleep, Little Bear? by Martin Wadell
- Where The Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
- Everett Anderson’s Goodbye by Lucille Clifton
- The Ghost Tree by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
- My Grandson Lew by Charlotte Zolotow
- Are You My Mother? by Philip Dey Eastman
- How Many Kisses Goodnight? by Jean Monrad
- The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown
- Bedtime for Francis by Lillian Hoban
- Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waler

Who are you?

- Writer
- Artist
- Friend
- Foe
- Chef
- Cleaner
- Player
- Reader
- Runner
- Caregiver
- Poet

Co-constructing identities:
Reading their own learning stories
Sense of Self

Learning about Ourselves: Self-Portraits

A Moment of Insight...
Early in the year, a parent shared a conversation she had had with her child. As the child had spoken of her new friends, she had referred to children of colour as ‘different’ while the white children were ‘normal’. This story prompted an exploration of what we look like. How do we see ourselves? How do we represent ourselves? How do we talk about visual differences?

Planning and Process...
Setting up the Environment: We worked at our usual drawing centre but I added specific tools to aid in drawing self-portraits.

Materials: I provided paper, small standing mirrors, and markers— including multicultural markers to more closely match a variety of skin tones.

Support: I invited children to draw themselves and I sat with them at the drawing table, posing questions such as “What colour marker do you think matches your skin?” or “What colour are you eyes?”, and suggested children revisit their image in the mirror.

Learning about Ourselves: Self-Portraits

Lola colours in her brown eyes.

“My hair is kind-of yellow.” — Sam

“I have green eyes.” — Felix

Lauren uses the mirror to study her features.
Documenting:
When the children were finished we mounted the portraits on a construction paper background and displayed a range of process photographs with captions on a bulletin board for families and visitors to see.

Learning:
Children made careful observations about themselves, and made decisions about best fit. They were able to use and gain language to talk about differences and similarities as they worked along side each other constructing their self-images. The children’s work shows how they actively represent themselves artistically as they transform their vision from one form to another.

Leigh White  UNB Children’s Centre

Why this matters:
As children take a closer look at themselves they begin to see what makes them unique. The task of representing themselves provides opportunities to see their individual features. By mounting a display their educator gives them a place to see themselves in relation to others and to talk together about how they are alike and how they are different. Skin colour is now represented by a range of tones – not just white and other. Children will continue to shape their identities through their relationships with others in a variety of social and cultural environments.

Other Possibilities:
- Create family portraits
- Sketch self-portraits later in the year to compare and contrast
- Construct books about selves (for example: “What our names mean”)
- Draw graphs and take surveys “About Us” (for example: bed times or number of pets)
- Use other art materials (for example: paints or pastels)
- Make 3-dimensional models (for example: yarn for hair or modeling clay)
- Have children photograph themselves and each other

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Reading Children: What song would you like to sing?

How can I offer the children (15 months) choice when they haven’t any [verbal] language yet?

I invite the infants to make choices of what song they would like to sing each day. I read their body language and gestures to determine what song to sing together. I have introduced a series of songs with gestures and the infants perform the gesture for the song they wish to sing.

Patty Morrice  Passamaquoddy Children’s Centre Inc.

Reading the Environment: Where do I put their names?

I looked around my room at the children’s eye level and I was surprised to see that there were no children’s names displayed. How do I change this with limited space for documentation? Where do I put their names? What form do I use to display their names?

I decided to trace their names out of foam so they would rise off the paper. That way the children can feel their names as well as see them. I taped their names, at their eye level, on the mirror. Now the children could feel and see their names, as well as their own reflections.

Donna Baisley  Just Kids Preschool Centre Inc.
For Reflection

Reflect upon your reactions to children’s behaviour. What strategies do you draw upon to address issues of conflict and disagreement between children? Who do these help and who might they harm? Think about how you model perseverance and persistence.

In what ways are individual children’s expressions of feelings, ideas, or concerns encouraged and supported? Think about time to listen, space to listen, and ways to encourage self-expression. Ask yourself if you are helping them to learn to take initiative.

Think about how varied cultural backgrounds influence feelings and beliefs about touch and personal space. Think about the kinds of touch children experience in your program. What is your own level of comfort with touch?

Recall specific examples of how you invite children to actively set their learning goals, persist in pursuing them, share their strengths and interests, celebrate their accomplishments, and persevere to solve challenges they encounter. In what ways does your planning reflect the interests and passions of the children?

First day I went out in my backyard and my hands were behind my back by Olivia
Sense of Other

What’s Involved in Learning

- Supporting, encouraging, and listening to others
- Caring for others
- Experiencing trust and compassion with children and adults
- Learning constructive ways to negotiate a range of relationships

Do children take their own photographs?

- Ask if the children want their picture taken
- Take action shots (at work, at play, at rest, with friends)
- Get down to the children’s level
- Shoot children’s painting, drawings, and constructions
- Take process photos (what came first, what happened next, what did the final product look like?)

Caring for others

Recognizing others

Using the other children’s name tags, Maggie writes invitations to a dramatic play party.

Your passions can inspire others!

Share Your favourite things... Gardening • Pets • Italian food • Snowmobiling •
Children thrive within webs of friendship and love. They develop their worldview and expectations by living inside relationships and by observing relationships around them.

Amy Baker and Lynn Manfredi-Petit (2004, ix)

Books to read together

*Flower Garden*, by Eve Bunting
*Old Henry*, by Joan Blos
*Stellaluna*, by Janell Cannon
*Moosetache*, by Margie Palatini
*Ruby The Copycat*, by Peggy Rathman
*Pig Pig Grows Up*, by David McPhail
*Ginger*, by Charlotte Voake

Communicating to work together

Listening...
is a way of thinking and seeing ourselves in relationship with others and the world.

Carlina Rinaldi (2005, 6)
Caring for Others: The Mitten Story

Every year at Christmas time our centre likes to do something to create awareness of our community. This past year we decided on a Mitten Tree. Our families would donate mittens and we would take them to a local charity. To help the children understand what we were doing we asked them questions such as how many mittens they had at home and why we wore mittens on our hands. The answers varied but we all understood that we had to have mittens to be able to play out in the snow. The next question concerned what it would feel like if we didn’t have any mittens or if we only had one pair. The children decided that if we only had one pair that would “suck” because than we would have to come inside as soon as they got wet or dirty.

The toddler room decided to make a paper tree and hang it on the wall. As the children brought in mittens they were hung on the tree. In the pre-school room we chose to hang our mittens on our Mitten Tree. Each child was given a snowman to decorate, write their name on and attach to the mittens they donated. Many of our children joined in to sort through their mitts at home, bringing in several pairs that were too small for them.

One morning in December we all got ready to take our mittens. We packed full grocery bags and off we went. The children were very excited to see the people who would be giving our mittens to, children who needed them. Once we arrived everyone got some mittens and we took them inside the building, dropping them in a box as we were enthusiastically thanked by the volunteers.

Later that month I didn’t have my mitts with me when we were going outside, I said I must have lost them and one of the children thought they could start a Mitten Tree for teachers!

Angela Thompson Kings County Kids Daycare Centre
Why this matters:

Cold, mittenless hands in the winter are something the children in the centre could all understand. Knowing that some people do not have mittens was a beginning to developing empathy and compassion for others. The educators designed a project to help children and their families take action. Compassion and care were enacted throughout as children and families brought in mittens and gloves and together delivered them to a local organization.

Other Possibilities:

Caring for others can take many forms:
- Visiting seniors regularly
- Contributing to the local food bank
- Making cards for sick friends
- Fundraising for global initiatives

What could you do in your centre?

What special occasions and local events can you celebrate by caring for others?
Dear Families,

We are very fortunate to have a new student, Vénel, in our classroom. Vénel started his life in Haiti and his parents are involved with "Healing Hands for Haiti," a group that travels from here to Haiti to provide health care and rehabilitation for people in that country. Vénel and his family will be making a trip to Haiti in April and we have decided to join in their efforts. We will also be fundraising to make money to send musical instruments and other equipment to be used in an orphanage. The first fundraiser will be to collect change in change jars in front of our room and in the cafeteria downstairs. On February 12 and 13 we plan to have a bake sale with the money going to this project. Colleen, Vénel’s Mom, will be coming into our room on February 12 to teach us about Haiti and we hope that Vénel will take lots of pictures to share with us when he is there.

Please talk to us if you have any questions or great ideas concerning this next fundraising project.

Jill and Leigh

Vénel, we have eagerly been waiting to meet our new community member and earlier this month we were able to welcome you into our room. Getting to know you and your family has inspired us to co-construct a project about caring for others.

Vénel’s family knows so much about the country of Haiti and are going on an upcoming trip with the group “Healing Hands for Haiti.” We are raising money to buy things for the orphanage his family and friends work with. Vénel’s parents approached us to come into our class and teach us a few things about this fascinating place.

Vénel and his mother showed us pictures of fishing boats, banana trees, art work, and the beautiful Haitian countryside.
Vénel’s dad pulled an incredible tiger mask from his big sports bag. We were interested to hear that it is made from paper mâché as we have just finished making a paper mâché dragon. In Haiti they don’t use boxes to make the basic form, they use sand or mud.

Vénel and his mother showed us the instruments from Haiti that people play during Carnival. Vénel led a procession around the room playing a Haitian instrument and everyone else followed with cha cha chas. It was fun to parade (Ra Ra) to the lively Haitian music.

Vénel, we are thrilled to have you with us this year. We can tell already that this classroom community will be a special place for you.

Gillian Bateman and Leigh White, UNB Children’s Centre

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For Reflection

How do you plan for welcoming new children and their families? Think about how you invite other children to participate in this process.

How do you support children in new situations and new relationships? Think about the children’s moments of anxiety, change, and responses to new people, places, and activities.

In what ways does your centre build upon dispositions of optimism, joy, and a zest for living and learning? Think about positive self-talk, problem solving, curiosity, humour, contributions, accomplishments, and care.

In what ways do you encourage children to think about how their actions affect other people, places, and things in their environments? How do you acknowledge the contributions children make? How do children acknowledge each other’s contributions?